THE BLACK BAT

MARKETS OF Treason

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The Black Bat's Triumph *and* Markets of Treason

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by Norman Daniels
writing as "G. Wayman Jones"

plus THE MASK–BITTER BATTLE AGAINST CRIME
by Kin Platt

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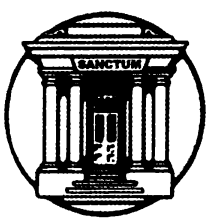

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THE BLACK BAT

Volume 5

Presenting TWO Complete Book-length novels from the files of Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime, as originally edited by Leo Margulies and Mort Weisinger

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THE BLACK BAT'S

The hunchbacks dragged Silk and Butch toward the barge. (Chap. VIII)

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "The Black Bat's Crusade," "The Black Bat Strikes Again," etc.

CHAPTER I
Hunchback Killers

IT was well after midnight and a slashing rain pounded against the windows of Grant Hollis' exclusive mansion. Inside, a fire on the hearth flickered cheerfully and Hollis himself was sprawled out in an easy chair nearby. A man of about fifty, he seemed at home among the trophies of the hunts which hung from the walls. Grizzly bear from Alaska, a leopard from African jungles, a massive elk head, a wild boar from India.

Grant Hollis had traveled during his lifetime

TRIUMPH

A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel

Featuring Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime

and he had met countless surprises, but none quite so stupendous as that which occupied his brain at the present moment.

He didn't hear the rain, but it was certainly a night when no one would expect weird-looking creatures to be stalking about. Yet, if someone with a good pair of eyes had been watching the rear of the Hollis home, he would have seen two eerie-looking beings dart from one drenched bush to another, always keeping well in the dark.

A profile of them would have shown that they were both, amazingly enough, hunchbacks. They wore wide-brimmed hats from which the rain poured off in rivulets. Their faces were masked by

black scarfs which were drawn tightly around their heads, leaving only their crafty eyes in view.

One of them signaled his companion to remain hidden. Then, he stalked closer to the house, clambered up on a small portico and sidestepped carefully until he could look through the French windows. His gloved hand stretched out and tried the latch. The window was locked.

He dug into a pocket, found a slender instrument and inserted this so gently that the man inside the room had no inkling of the doom that was approaching. The gentle click was hushed by the lashing torrent of rain. From the darkness came the second hunchback, drawing a gun as he approached.

Hollis felt the cold draft against the back of his head and also noticed that the sound of the rain was stronger than ever now. He arose abruptly and turned toward the French door.

Then he stopped. His eyes narrowed, his lips set in a hard line. Hollis was no coward. Even the two eerie creatures who faced him with drawn guns only made his heart beat a little faster.

"Burglars eh," he said coldly. "Well, what do you want?"

"Sit down," one of the men ordered gruffly. "Use your head and you won't get hurt. Try one trick and we'll blow your ears off."

HOLLIS backed away slowly, avoided two or three chairs and finally reached a swivel chair behind his desk. If he was going to be tied up, he wanted to be strapped to that particular chair. Hollis' mind was working fast. He noticed that both intruders were hunchbacks and he coolly reasoned that it was almost too coincidental for two burglars to be so afflicted. In the first place, it made marked men of them both.

They used silken tie-backs from the portieres to bind him and they did a remarkably good job of it. They didn't gag him. Then one of the burglars let the muzzle of his gun rest against Hollis' temple.

"Just give us the combination of the wall safe, brother, and tell us where it's hidden, too."

Hollis gave the number and indicated where they might find the safe. He watched them open it, loot the contents and fill a small satin sack with convertible bonds, cash and jewels.

The total take was probably ten thousand dollars, all covered by insurance. Hollis made no mistake of trying to yell for help. Something told him these men were born killers, without an iota of mercy in their grotesque makeups.

"There must be more than this around," one of the men said. "Let's search the whole place. Make sure that baby can't get loose first."

Hollis could have informed them that their work of tying him up was perfect. But they tested his bonds anyway, to their satisfaction, and both of them started a tour of the first floor to search for more loot. They returned, after several minutes, carrying some precious keepsakes which Hollis had obtained on his travels. He winced as these were dumped into the satin sack.

Then both men headed for the second floor. They seemed so certain of themselves that Hollis realized this was no chance job. These two men knew that there were no servants in the house this night and that Hollis was the only occupant. This robbery had been carefully planned. He heard their footsteps in the hallway of the second floor and Hollis waited no longer.

He turned the swivel chair until his hands could reach a top drawer. He pulled this open very quietly and revealed a telephone inside. Scrupulously neat, Hollis hated to litter the top of his desk with a phone. He had had this one installed in the drawer. He leaned forward, pulling the chair off the floor to do so, and picked up a pencil with his teeth. Then he sat back, maneuvered the chair again, and finally managed to get the pencil into the dialing slots.

He had already removed the instrument from its cradle and supported it against the side of the drawer. It was painful work, for the bonds were tight and he had to strain against them, cutting off the blood supply to his extremities.

He dialed the last number and heard a voice answer:

"Police Headquarters."

"Give me Commissioner Warner—quickly," Hollis whispered.

He heard a click and then Police Commissioner Warner's voice came over the wire.

"This is Grant Hollis," the burglar victim whispered. "There are two armed thieves in my home. Send help, but send it quietly. They don't know I phoned and your men can surround the house and nab them as they get away. Hurry!"

"Sending radio cars with muted sirens,"

Warner advised. "Hang on, Hollis. Help will be there within four or five minutes."

GRANT HOLLIS let go with a long sigh of relief. Then he heard the men coming downstairs again and he closed the desk drawer all but a bare inch or two. When they strode into the room again, he was sitting erect in the chair and eyeing them with open contempt.

"You're being a smart guy," one hunchback said. "Now, have you got any more dough hanging around or jewelry? Hell, mister, you're covered by insurance. You might as well make things easy for us so we'll go easy on you. You got nothing to lose so..."

Suddenly, both intruders stopped dead, as though some invisible sign had come to them. They didn't move for fully half a minute. Then one of them ground out a curse.

"So you warned the cops, eh? They're sending help, are they? Well, mister, that means lights out for you."

The second hunchback hurried to the davenport, picked up a thick pillow and thrust his gun into its depths. Hollis' eyes grew wide in horror as he watched this killer approach and press the pillow against his head. He could feel the muzzle of the gun through its thickness and knew what they intended to do—shoot through the pillow to mask the roar of the weapon. Hollis strained forward horribly.

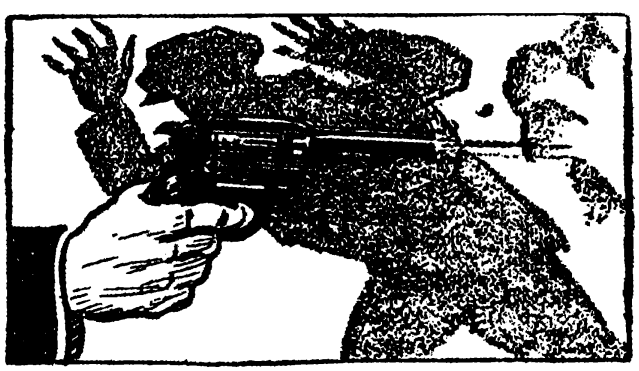
"It's murder! They'll burn you for this, you fools! You can get clear if you hurry."

"We still got two minutes before them radio cars get here," one of the men snarled. "They'll find you croaked. And maybe you understand, it ain't just because you got in touch with the cops that we're doing this. You had it coming anyway. So long—sap."

Hollis screamed one word:

"Garland!"

Then the gun exploded. Hollis didn't hear the roar of the weapon for the bullet had already shattered his senses before the thunder of the weapon could blast his eardrums. The killer backed away, flung the pillow on the floor. His teammate grabbed up several ornaments which he threw into the satin sack. He swung this over his back and both men raced for the door.



They vaulted the low railing and headed out across the estate. Headlights from a police radio car swerved around the corner and encompassed them in their glare. A gun cracked. Both hunchbacks whirled, raised their own weapons and threw a hail of leaden death straight at the radio car.

A MAN screamed. The door of the police car opened. One uniformed patrolman jumped out and leveled his gun. He fired two shots before a chunk of remarkably well-aimed lead pounded into his chest. He wilted and fell into the rain-swollen gutter.

For a few seconds, there was a grim silence. Then a police whistle shrilled and barked orders called for a rapid advance on the killers.

Lieutenant McGrath, short, stocky, bald-headed and rain-drenched was in charge of the police cordon. He issued his orders and then hurried into the house. He grimaced at what he found tied to that swivel chair. His eyes spotted the partly open desk drawer and the phone it contained. He picked up the instrument and discoved that Commissioner Warner was still on the wire.

"Hollis is dead, sir," McGrath reported. "Shot through the head by some rotten, cold-blooded murderers while he was tied in this chair. But we'll get 'em. I've got plenty of men thrown around the whole block and Sergeant Wolfe is giving orders over the two-way radio set in his car. Radio cars will converge from every direction. We had a look at the two guys—both hunchbacks. Yes, I said hunchbacks. Two of our men wounded, one pretty bad."

McGrath hung up and darted back out into the rain to give more directions. But half an hour later, he discovered that the pair of killers had eluded the cordon of police and escaped. He spent another half an hour searching the house and found nothing. Fingerprint men dusted likely spots and discovered no significant prints.

McGrath began to get the idea that the murderers were as clever as they were ruthless. His only chance now was to check on what was missing and have all the pawnshops and fences watched.

Then two of Hollis' servants returned. After they recovered from the shock of seeing their employer dead, they talked. McGrath began making a list of what was missing.

"About twelve grand all told," he figured aloud.

CHAPTER II
The Blind Cannot Help

EARLY the next evening, Police Commissioner Warner stopped his car in front of a large house, shielded from the street by tall, regal trees and cleverly cultivated bushes. There was a beat brass nameplate fastened to the gate. It read:

Tony Quinn

Warner opened the gate, walked up a path and stepped on the porch. He rang the bell and the door was quickly opened by a slender, almost bald-headed man whose eyes flashed over Warner suspiciously. Norton Kirby, better known as Silk, was Tony Quinn's butler, valet and general all-around man. He had once been in active conflict with the law and he regarded all law officers with a remnant of his old animosity.

"Good evening, Silk," the commissioner said affably. "Tony's home, I hope."

Silk flashed a smile that was genuine. He liked this democratic, jovial police commandant.

"Yes, sir, and I rather think he'll be glad to know you're here. sir. A blind man finds life boring, you know."

Warner nodded and walked into the spacious library. He could see the back of a big, comfortable chair and a column of pipe smoke rising slowly above it. A mellow voice greeted him.

"Come in, Commissioner. I'm delighted to have company."

Warner pulled up a chair and for a moment or two gazed in silence at the man who sat before the fireplace. He saw a well-built person, clad in rumpled tweeds and a smoking jacket. He held a well-heeled pipe between his teeth and he looked into the blazing fireplace without the least tremor in his eyes.

Flames meant nothing to this man, for his eyes held the stark deadness of the totally blind. His face, just below the eyes, was horribly scarred and the scars gleamed in the firelight until Commissioner Warner grimaced at the sight of them.

He knew how Tony Quinn had become blind. Once Quinn had been a determined, resolute district attorney, fighting crime tooth and nail. Then, one day in open court, gangsters had endeavored to destroy evidence with acid. Quinn had interfered and the acid was flung into his face. It had seared deeply and the best eye doctors in the world had pronounced Tony Quinn as a hopeless case.

His resignation was automatic and he had become a recluse. Independently wealthy, he managed to exist very comfortably, but his sightless eyes and his face constantly held the bitterness of a man defeated early in life.

Commissioner Warner helped himself to a pipeful of Quinn's aromatic tobacco, lit up and leaned back in his chair.

"Tony, I'm up against another stone wall. I like to come here and talk these cases over with you. The legal background you have helps me tremendously at times and I know I can trust you. Of course, you read of the murder of Grant Hollis last night?"

Quinn nodded. "Silk read it to me from the newspapers. Hollis was a good man. I hope you land the devils who murdered him. But what makes this case so important? All I gathered was that he tried to get word to you and they killed him for it. They simply robbed his house. Nothing out of the ordinary there."

"But you're wrong," Warner said tensely. "Hollis phoned me. I sent radio cars out under orders to go quietly and surround the house. There was an open connection between my phone and Hollis'. I heard the two burglars talking. And then, suddenly, I heard them tell him I'd been warned and that radio cars were on the way. If Hollis was right, there was no possibility of their knowing this had happened. Yet they did—even to how much time they had before the radio cars would get there.

"I heard one of them tell Hollis that he was being killed partly because he had warned the police, but mostly because of something else. He didn't say what. Then Hollis yelled one word and I couldn't have been mistaken about it either.

"He called out the word—'Garland.' I've checked on all of Hollis' friends and I can find no one with that name. Our records show no crooks with that name either."

TONY QUINN puffed slowly on his pipe.

"And there is something else, Commissioner. I can tell by the inflection in your voice. Blind men rely on their remaining senses, you know, and my ears are especially good."

"You don't have to remind me of that," Warner said. "I've seen concrete examples of it. Yes. you're right, Tony. There is something else.

"Ninety minutes ago, the same murderers appeared at the home of Robert Kilpatrick, the financier. They tied him up, looted his home and then one of his servants returned unexpectedly. He happened to look in the window before he entered the house, saw his master tied up and promptly went to the nearest phone and called headquarters.

"When my men arrived, Kilpatrick was murdered, the killers gone and seven thousand dollars in gems, cash and trinkets missing. Now, those men left very abruptly, without finishing the job of looting certain silver services which Kilpatrick owned. They were warned somehow that the police were on the way. How in heaven's name could they have known in both instances?"

"How do you know it was the same pair of killers?" Quinn asked quietly.

On the surface he betrayed no emotion at all, but inwardly he was seething. There was something mysterious about these murders and the way the pair of killers were warned of danger. Behind them must be a brilliant mind, a brainy man who directed his agents and kept them from capture.

"That's easy," Warner answered. "In both cases the killers were seen. They were similarly dressed and both men were hunchbacks. And that's not all. Five other homes were robbed tonight. In two cases the burglars were seen. They were hunchbacks."

Quinn pursed his lips and whistled softly.

"It does sound interesting. Of course, they left no clues. But Commissioner, what can I do to help you? I'm blind! Helpless as a ten-minute-old kitten. But don't bother to answer. I know the reason. You kindly seek me out to give me something to think about.

"I have been able to offer a few suggestions in past cases, mainly because I have nothing to do but brood on them. This one is different. It calls for some conclusive action and I—well I'm not capable of that."

"Yes, I know." Warner puffed serenely on his pipe. "This is one of the cases I'd like to see the Black Bat get his teeth into. Don't sit there chuckling at me. I know Lieutenant McGrath is positive you are the Black Bat. I know you suspect I think the same thing. Maybe I do and maybe I don't. That makes no difference.

"I'm merely venturing a hope, remote perhaps. But even though the Black Bat uses methods that aren't exactly in line with the laws of this State, there are times when that kind of action is called for.

"Damn it, Tony, if I were sure you were the Black Bat, I'd tell you to go ahead and handle it your own way. I'm not sure. I only hope, and that's forlorn, too, because how on Earth could you be the Black Bat? I know of all the examinations you've had. Every doctor has pronounced you hopelessly and completely blind. Lieutenant McGrath has checked with them until they're sick of seeing him."

QUINN threw back his head and laughed out loud.

THE BLACK BAT

"Poor McGrath. Time and again he's tried to trick me. I couldn't see him, but I could feel it. Once, he lit a match and held it so close to my eyes that he almost burned the tip of my nose.

"No, Commissioner, you're wrong. As you have said, I couldn't be the Black Bat even though I'd sell my soul to be in his shoes—or, shall I say, his wings. How about a drink?"

Warner got up.

"No thanks. I need a bottle of aspirin tablets much more than alcohol. Thanks anyway, Tony. I'm going to have a last look at the homes of both murdered men. Then I'll withdraw the guards I've placed there. No use maintaining them when there isn't a speck of a clue. Thanks again."

Silk watched the commissioner until he drove away. Then he hurried into the library and hastily drew the window shades. Tony Quinn hadn't moved, but his face had changed. Those dead eyes sparkled with life now.

"He was trying to trip you up that time, sir," Silk said.

"No, Silk. Warner suspects I'm the Black Bat, but he can't prove it any more than Lieutenant McGrath can. Still, Warner would like to have the Black Bat take a hand in this case. He made his story interesting enough, too, because if I did happen to be the Black Bat, then I'd go for it in a big way—which is exactly what I'm doing.

"Those murders may be part of a crime ring, but I don't think so. They were too coolly and

deliberately staged. Remember, in five other robberies no one was killed. Hollis and Kilpatrick were not murdered simply because the police were on their way. The killers would have wanted every second possible to make good their escape. Staying long enough to commit murder is proof they intended to do this all along.

"What I'd like to know is, how in the world they found out the police were coming? And why hunchbacked killers? Men crippled that way are usually sickly and weak. Very few of them are cut out to be ruthless killers or even burglars. Silk, if Warner wanted to get the Black Bat interested in this case, he certainly succeeded. Phone Butch and Carol. Have them come over, at once. We're starting in while the trail is hot."

Silk nodded eagerly.

He was more than willing to put his sharp wits to the task of out-thinking murderers. Silk had once been a confidence man and then a burglar. He had saved Quinn's life by risking his own liberty to do so. From that moment on, he had become Quinn's devoted friend and ally.

As he dialed a number which would connect him with Carol Baldwin, he thought back to the dark days when Tony Quinn really had been blind. Then she had come, blonde and lovely, to provide the one means of restoring his sight. Her father had been a law officer and dying from a bandit's bullet. He bequeathed his eyes to Tony Quinn so that the fight against crime could go on.

A skillful and little-known country surgeon had performed the operation and Tony Quinn saw once more. The operation had been kept extremely secret.

Besides Carol and Silk, only one other person knew that Tony Quinn could see and that he was the Black Bat. This man was Jack O'Leary, better known as "Butch" because of his massive size. He wasn't a fast thinker, but he was faithful, and when the Black Bat needed brawn, Butch really proved his worth.

THIRTY minutes later, the four of them were gathered in the privacy of Tony Quinn's laboratory, concealed cleverly behind the walls of his study. Here, every scientific device used in fighting crime, was at Quinn's fingertips. Volumes on crime psychology, toxicology, microscopic analysis and all the equipment necessary to put their theories into active use.

Quinn sat beside Carol and held one of her hands between his own. Something more than friendship had grown up between these two. But now, everyone was tense as Quinn spoke.

"We've got to strike hard and fast. Silk, you'll have to be my liaison officer for the present.

CAROL

Sorry, but you remain here to receive and broadcast my orders if I need help. Carol, you'll begin an investigation immediately of Grant Hollis and Robert Kilpatrick.

"Delve into their lives. consult people who can give you a line on their friends and enemies, their finances, who would benefit by their deaths. Just keep away from their homes because I'm going there myself. Commissioner Warner very kindly presented the Black Bat with an open invitation to check both houses for clues. He told me he was withdrawing all guards. Then check on the other five victims. Get their names from the newspapers."

"How about me, Boss?" Butch's rumbling voice broke in. "Don't I get to sock somebody on the nose?"

"Maybe," Quinn grinned. "In fact, I'll almost guarantee it. However, for the present, you circulate around in the underworld resorts. See if you can get a line on a pair of hunchbacked crooks who are very friendly with each other. Listen to what's being said about these two murders and keep out of trouble."

Quinn raised a trapdoor set in the floor. Butch went down a ladder and made his way along a tunnel until he reached a garden house at the further end of Tony Quinn's estate. He slipped out to the street and disappeared. This means of entrance and exit was worth a hundred times the work Quinn, Silk and Butch had put in to fashion it.

Quinn opened a locker and took out some neatly folded black pieces of cloth. Carol smiled at him, turned around and faced the wall while Quinn slipped out of his tweeds and smoking jacket. He donned black trousers, a black silk

shirt, black crepe shoes, black gloves that fitted as tightly as if they were made of rubber.

Finally, he drew a hood over his head. It concealed his face, masking the hideous scars from the burning acid. A cloak formed the rest of his regalia. It was a peculiar cloak for it was ribbed. like the wings of a bat and, when he extended his arms, he looked for all the world like one of those nocturnal mammals in full flight.

The clicking of the mechanism of two heavy Forty-five calibre automatics brought Carol around to face him again. She walked to his side, grasped his arm lightly and looked into his eyes.

"Tony, I know you have to do this. Only, please be careful. I-I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to you. Really, I don't!"

He patted her cheek and smiled.

"They've tried every device known to erase me from the face of the Earth, darling. I'm still alive and I'll stay that way. Now, the Black Bat is taking flight. Remember to contact Silk every fifteen minutes. I may need all the help I can get."

The Black Bat slipped down the ladder and vanished.

If the underworld could have witnessed this scene, the men who comprised it would have shuddered and sought their various rat-holes. They all knew and dreaded the Black Bat.

CHAPTER III
Death Trap

LOGAN, valet to the late Grant Hollis, didn't like it when the police guard was abruptly withdrawn. All the other servants had quit in a body and be was alone in this big house which violent death had visited so recently. He was nervous and ill at ease. What if those two hunchbacked killers should come back? What chance would he have?

He got up and poured himself a drink. His hands shook badly and he sat down again, jumping at every creak emitted by the massive house. Then Logan didn't jump—he just sat frozen. Even the powerful whiskey trickling down his throat didn't make him wince. There was a hand resting on his shoulder.

"No need to be alarmed," a voice said quietly. "I'm not here to harm you, Logan. Get up and have a look at me."

Logan arose very slowly. His eyes grew wide and round when he saw the somber figure of the Black Bat standing behind the chair. Logan had never seen the Black Bat before, but he had heard of him and there was something about those piercing eyes that shone from behind the mask which reassured him.

"Y-yes, sir," he gulped. "You're the Black Bat. I-I'll do anything I can to help you."

"Fine," the somber figure said. "Now tell me about everything that was stolen. Not the money or jewels, but other things, personal articles and curios."

Logan pointed at the mantelpiece.

"There were four articles there used merely as ornaments. They weren't worth a great deal. One was a vase, another a statuette, a small hand-colored portrait on a small easel and a lacquered jewel box which the master picked up in northern Africa some years ago. All told, these things were worth perhaps fifty dollars apiece."

The Black Bat moved back, suddenly extinguished all the lights in the room.

"Hollis was quite a sportsman, eh Logan? That boar's head, where did he bag that?"

Logan's jaw dropped. "Why, how can you see it in this darkness? Th–the master shot that beast in Bahawal, a little independent state somewhere between India and Tibet. That happened two or three years ago, sir. But I still can't imagine how you could possibly see in this darkness."

The Black Bat's lips curled into a smile. Many other persons had wondered the same thing and only the Black Bat and his three associates knew the answer.

When the operation on Tony Quinn's eyes had been completed, he had developed a super-sensitive sight which enabled him to see almost as clearly in darkness as in the brightest light. Even colors assumed their appropriate hue to his eyes. Other details made him something of a superman, too. The months of blindness had developed his hearing and his sense of touch to an astonishing degree.

"Sorry we have to continue our little talk in darkness, Logan, but if anyone should happen to look in the windows—well, I wouldn't want to be seen: Now describe those articles that were on the mantelpiece."

LOGAN wished his whiskey glass wasn't empty.

"There was nothing outstanding about them, sir. Yet, now that I think about it, the master seemed very excited the day before he was murdered. He was in this very room when he shouted something, grabbed his hat and ran out to his car. Not long after, he phoned me, said he was at his office and that he was dining out. Now about the articles that were stolen—as I told you, they were not of particular importance or value."

"So Hollis went to his office in a rush." The

Black Bat's remark came out of the darkness. "Logan, did Hollis know this Robert Kilpatrick who was murdered a few hours ago?"

Logan frowned and the Black Bat's eyes penetrated the gloom to see that facial contortion.

He sighed, then spoke.

"Well, sir, it really was very odd about Mr. Kilpatrick. They did not know one another, yet Mr. Kilpatrick came here early this afternoon to offer his condolences. He practically forced himself into the house, sir, and went directly to this room where we're standing now. He looked around and then hurried out."

Logan waited for more questions and none came. He tried to figure out where the black figure was standing, but the darkness was too complete. Two minutes went by and Logan's wobbly nerves let go.

"Say something, sir. I–I don't like this darkness. I–I can't stand it. I'll tell you more about the things that were stolen. Shall I?"

There was no answer. With a choked cry, Logan sped toward the nearest lamp and turned it on. There was no one in the room.

"Vanished! Without making a sound," Logan gasped. "I'm glad he isn't on my trail."

The Black Bat had slipped out the door as quietly as a ghost. Kilpatrick's residence was only about ten blocks away. He vaulted a hedge, crossed the sidewalk like a blob of shadow and climbed into a cheap coupé which he had parked conveniently near the Hollis place.

As he drove toward Kilpatrick's, his agile mind went over details. Kilpatrick hadn't come to Hollis' home to offer any condolences. He had paid that visit merely to satisfy his curiosity about something. What?

If the two men were not acquainted, how could Kilpatrick know that Hollis owned something of interest? And what had made Hollis cry out and rush directly to his offices on the top floor of the big downtown building which bore his name? More and more the Black Bat realized that while this case looked like the work of crude burglars, there was something else that lay behind it.

The Kilpatrick home was the equal of the Hollis mansion. It lay in the center of a huge estate and the entire first floor was lit up. The Black Bat parked his coupé, invaded the estate and hurried toward the rear of the house.

He crouched below a window, risked a quick look into an empty room and then repeated that operation until he discovered the study in which a gray-haired man sat behind a desk and studied reams of documents stacked before him.

The Black Bat knew this man. He was an attorney, a good one, too, who had two specialties as far apart as the poles. He was an expert on estates and one of the shrewdest criminal attorneys in the country. Jay Fenner was anything but a fool.

THE BLACK BAT looked up toward the second floor. A window beckoned invitingly. He climbed a tree, crawled out on a thick limb and a moment later stood inside a bedroom. He stepped into the hallway outside and listened. There wasn't a sound in the big house. Apparently, Jay Fenner was the only person present.

The Black Bat crept down the staircase, drew a gun and moved silently into the room until he stood directly in front of the desk where Jay Fenner was at work. The attorney sensed more than saw his visitor. He looked up, gave a startled exclamation and jumped to his feet. His chair went catapulting backwards.

"Sorry to have alarmed you," the Black Bat said quietly. "Please pick up your chair and sit down again, Mr. Fenner. Pardon the gun I'm holding. It's merely to indicate that I hold the upper hand."

Fenner recovered his wits quickly. He stood the chair on its legs and sat down again.

"The Black Bat!" he exclaimed. "So you've taken an interest in this case. Why? It's nothing but a cheap robbery and murder." The Black Bat disregarded the question. He indicated the papers strewn on the desk with a wave of his gun. "Have you discovered anything interesting among Kilpatrick's papers, Fenner? Who inherits his money, by the way?"

"His cousin, James Downing, gets everything. You know Downing, the polo player and big game hunter?"

"I know Downing," the Black Bat replied. "Have you a list of the things stolen from this house?"

Fenner looked up at the piercing eyes that gleamed from behind the mask. He shivered and decided he'd never laugh derisively again when one of his crook clients brought up the name of this Nemesis of Crime. He fumbled among the papers and found what he wanted.

"Jewelry worth three thousand, two thousand in cash and three more in negotiable bonds. A neat haul! There were a few other things taken, too, inconsequential objects. A bookend, for instance. They only stole one and left the other. An enameled humidor, worth about five dollars, a small desk clock.

"Looks to me as though the robbers merely swept everything off Kilpatrick's desk into a sack of some kind. They were inhuman devils! Did you know they tortured Kilpatrick before they put a bullet through his skull? Burned his fingers in a ghastly fashion!"

The Black Bat's eyes flicked over the spacious room. It was more of a trophy room than a study.

LIKE Hollis, Kilpatrick had been a renowned big game hunter. The usual array of heads lined the walls. One trophy especially intrigued the Bat. It was a cobra, stuffed by an expert taxidermist and mounted in a coil. There was a brass plaque below the exhibit. The Black Bat read the words even though he stood too far away for the average man's eyes to have made out the lettering:

1939—Bahawal Cobra

The Black Bat bowed toward Attorney Fenner.

"Thank you. The cooperation was even better than I'd hoped to get from a criminal attorney whose clients are my enemies."

Fenner laughed. "I do it for money. I don't class the rats I serve as friends."

As Fenner finished talking, the lights went out. He muttered a curse, but he didn't arise to put them back on until fully five minutes had elapsed.

"Damn impudent devil," he muttered to himself. "If I only had a gun—"

Fenner made a sudden decision. He reached for the phone and dialed rapidly.

"Hello, Downing," he said. "Fenner speaking. I have some news for you. The Black Bat was here. He wormed information out of me that connects you with this case. He may be on his way to see you.

"Get a gun, hide it well and if you get a chance, shoot him. What? Well why not? The man's a crook, isn't he? He's wanted by the police. And Downing, I happen to know that the underworld has a standing offer of fifty thousand dollars for the man who knocks him off. So that interests you, does it? Good, we'll split and—shoot straight and fast!"

CHAPTER IV
Gun Flame

THE night watchman in the Hollis Building rang his clock at the far end of the top-floor corridor. He passed by an office labeled with Grant Hollis' name and marked private. The watchman shivered. He didn't like to be near things which were associated with violent death—not even in an empty office.

He passed a darkened office door, had no idea that it opened after he had gone by. His first inkling of danger came with violent force.

Something struck him a tremendous blow on the skull. He reeled a few steps, sagged against the wall. As he slipped toward the floor, he wondered if he was already dead and descending into the depths. There were four—no five weird-looking creatures converging on him. They were all clad in black, with wide-brimmed hats pulled low and black scarfs drawn around their faces. And—they were all hunchbacked.

One of the hunchbacks bent over him. Evil eyes glittered. A glistening knife was raised high. It came down in an arc that proved the wielder was no novice at murder. The watchman didn't see anything after that. A man with a blade piercing his heart never does.

"Hurry," one of the hunchbacked men muttered. "Drag that watchman into one of the offices and wipe up the blood. Matt, go to work on the door of Hollis' office. Mac, roll the tank of gas up here. Don't make any more noise than necessary. I'll put in the watchman's rings for him. Get going!"

Each of the hunchbacked men seemed to know exactly what his share of the work consisted of. An oxy-acetylene torch assembly was rolled out of a freight elevator. The hunchback called Matt had the office door open and the tank was quickly rolled inside.

Flashlights with taped lenses allowing only a small crack of light to filter through, searched the room and finally rested on a huge, modern safe. One of the intruders pulled down the scarf around his face a little, donned blue glasses and got the torch going.

Outside in the corridors, near the elevator shaft, two more hunchbacked men stood guard with drawn guns. Neither of them heard nor saw an office door open twenty feet down the corridor. If any trouble turned up, it would come from either the elevators or the stairway. The offices on this floor were all empty. One of the guards glanced to his left. He blinked and started to raise his gun.

"The Black Bat!" he yelled in a hoarse scream.

His gun barked and it was echoed by the roar of a forty-five automatic in the Black Bat's fist. The second guard began shouting for help and running madly toward the stairway.

Just before he reached it, he paused long enough to take a pot shot at the sinister being who stood in the center of the corridor. The bullet only hit the ceiling, for as his finger compressed the trigger, the Black Bat's gun blazed again and the hunchbacked man's hand became a bloody pulp.

He screamed in pain, tripped and went rolling down the stairs.

THE door of Grant Hollis' office opened and three men ran out. The Black Bat faced them with guns ready. Three pairs of arms shot high.

"Stay exactly as you are," the Black Bat

warned. "Your friends were foolish and suffered for it. Take sidesteps until you come to the end of the corrider, then tum around and face the wall."

The men began moving as commanded. The somber figure watched them intently. He didn't expect to win this bout so easily and he sensed that there was still a terrific amount of danger in the building. His keen eyes saw the faces of the three hunchbacks change.

He kept one gun pointed at them, half turned around and saw two more of the weird beings rushing toward him. He fired twice. One of the men went down, clawing at his shoulder. The other swerved and beat a hasty retreat.

But there were more of them! Hollis' office gave forth two others and three more came up the stairway.

"It's the Black Bat!" one of the men at the head of the stairs yelled. "Get him! Gun him out! He can't get away now. We've got every exit covered."

The Black Bat's guns blazed and he leaped forward in a fierce attack. It sent the men in the hallway scurrying toward the stairwell for protection. But the others, who were lined up against the wall, swung into action now.

A bullet struck the tile wall behind the Black Bat, ricocheted dangerously close and made him realize there were too many for one man to handle. His lunge had carried him directly in front of the office door through which he had gained entrance. He backed toward it—and then he was gone.

One of the hunchbacked men gave a shout of triumph.

"He's cornered. One of you guys tell Mac to hurry with that safe. Somebody will report this shooting in a minute, but before we leave, the Black Bat is going to find out what hot lead tastes like. Cover this office. I'll shoot the lock away and when the door opens, throw plenty of lead around—and fast."

The killer edged his way along, back against the wall, until he was close to the door through which the Black Bat had vanished. He aimed his gun and fired three quick shots. The lock flew into pieces. He gave a quick jump past the door, kicking it wide open as he did so. Inside was nothing but darkness and no flaming gun muzzles gave away the presence of the Black Bat.

"Okay," the hunchback growled elatedly. "He's got to be inside. Hiding maybe, until we show our hand. We're thirty-three stories above the ground. The only way out of this office is through the window, and unless the Bat can really fly, he's still inside. Get set, we're going to take him."

The man who had assumed leadership of the killers waved his gun and charged through the door.

Nothing happened. The leader found a switch and turned on the lights. He surveyed the small office with his mouth agape. There were no other doors. The window was tightly closed—and there was no sign of the Black Bat.

"But he went in here," the hunchback exclaimed. "We all saw him. Maybe he had a rope ladder and he went to the roof."

The window was hurriedly opened and no rope dangled outside. The hunchback peered straight down to the street and shivered. He raised his eyes and looked over the tops of the buildings far below, as if he expected to see the wings of the Black Bat outlined against the night sky.

HE closed the window with a bang, growled a curse and kicked a chair savagely. "Okay, you guys," he snarled. "Search every damned office on the floor. Make it snappy because the cops may head for this place any second. Find the Black Bat, hear me? Find him and fill his hide full of holes. I'm going back and see how Mac made out."

The hunchback watched his men deploy and start searching the offices. He walked briskly toward Hollis' private quarters, but he kept looking over his shoulder every step or two.

Damn the Black Bat! He could materialize out of nowhere and vanish as completely as a puff of steam. At any moment, the somber figure might step before him with spitting guns. The crook shivered, stuffed a hand into his coat pocket and pulled out a grenade.

He had hesitated using this before because of the tremendous racket it would make, but if the Black Bat showed now, he'd pull the pin and let him have it. He thrust his finger through the ring and kept the grenade half hidden behind him.

He heard the reassuring hiss of Mac's torch and he stepped boldly into the office. Something drilled against his left side. He froze. Mac, kneeling before the safe, was working fast while sweat poured down his face and his eyes, behind the colored glasses, were abject in terror.

The hunchback leader risked a glance toward his left and he shuddered. The Black Bat had materialized again.

"Just stand very quiet," the dark shadow warned, "until your friend gets through opening the safe. I'm greatly interested to know what Hollis hid there and why you men want it."

The hunchback's warped mind decided on a bold gesture. The Black Bat hadn't noticed the grenade. He began slipping the pin out very slowly. The safe dial dropped to the floor with a thud. Mac glanced over his shoulder and the Black Bat gestured with his gun. Mac pulled the

heavy door wide open.

"Walk forward!" the Black Bat ordered the hunchback. "Remove whatever you were after from that safe."

The only light in the room was the bluish flame of the oxy-acetylene torch which Mac held in a shaking hand. The hunchback leader yanked the pin free and snapped the grenade into a far corner of the office. Then he gave a wild shout, pushed the Black Bat violently and darted out the door, slamming it shut after him.

The Black Bat's eyes flicked across the room in the direction of the thud which the grenade had made. He saw it rolling slowly toward the wall.

"Save yourself!" he yelled at Mac. "It's a grenade!"

He made a dive toward Hollis' heavy steel desk, grabbed the edge of it and turned the heavy piece of furniture over on top of himself. Mac gave a scream of terror and headed for the door.

Then the grenade let go. The explosion rocked the whole upper part of the building. The office walls collapsed, the window was blown completely out.

Mac, caught in the full devastating force of the explosion, died instantly. Heavy chunks of plaster fell on top of the steel desk. There was no movement beneath it.

In the corridor outside, the hunchback leader gave a shout of triumph and headed toward the office.

"If that didn't get him, nothing ever will," he gloated. "This is one time the Black Bat was up against a guy with brains."

HE stopped talking and seemed to be listening intently.

"Inside with you," he ordered his men. "Never mind anything but the safe. Get the stuff out of it and work fast. A hundred radio cars are coming this way and we've got to get clear."

They opened the door and even the callous hunchback leader shuddered at the appalling ruin within. He saw Mac's limp body spread out on the floor, stepped over it and went directly to the safe.

He fumbled around inside for a moment, drew out something and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he glanced toward the further end of the room. Hollis' desk was turned over and he could see a pair of legs sticking out beneath it.

"Take a look, boys, at what's left of the Black Bat!" he exulted. "Now get out of here. I'd like to see who was behind that mask, but the cops are entering the building now. We take the freight elevator, shoot straight down and if any cops are in the cellar, give it to them."

CHAPTER V
Plunge to Eternity

ALL the men started racing down the corridor with their leader streaking well ahead. One man, the last to leave the wrecked office, didn't see Mac's corpse in time. He tripped and fell flat on his face. The force of the impact with the floor stunned him and when he raised his head again, he realized that he had been trapped. Several patrolmen, drawn guns ready, were racing along the corridor.

The crook rose hastily and looked around for some exit. His eyes swept toward the toppled desk. Those two feet were no longer in evidence. He felt a cool breeze and automatically turned to look at the window. It was wide open and a rope swayed before his startled gaze. There was no other way out for him.

He ran to the window, grabbed the rope and went over the sill. He didn't dare look down into space as deep as eternity. He hauled himself up slowly, praying that the police wouldn't notice the rope dangling by the window.

He was nearly at the top. But this man lived an easy life. His hardest work for years, had been wielding a blackjack at some helpless victim's skull. His muscles were getting tired. He began to slip and a wail of anguish came from his lips. Then a soft voice called down to him from the rooftop.

"Hang on. I'll haul you up."

He knew that voice could belong to but one person—the Black Bat. But even facing that ominous figure was better than falling thirty-odd stories to a hideous death below. His fingers fastened frantically to the rope. Then he felt himself being pulled slowly upward. Strong hands seized his shoulders and lifted him onto the roof. He flopped there, unable to move, his brain spinning, his senses outraged by this encounter with death.

The Black Bat threw the rope on the roof and rushed over to the edge. He peered down. There were radio cars closing in from every direction. He was as completely trapped as he had been in Hollis' office when the hunchback leader hurled the grenade.

His lips compressed themselves into a tight line. At any moment, a horde of patrolmen would come up on the roof.

The hunchback, whom the Black Bat had rescued, was on his knees now and reaching for his gun. Thoughts of the fifty thousand dollars reward for the Black Bat's death dulled his puny brain. It didn't occur to him that he was in the same deadly trap as his intended victim and that the police were bound to get him.

He leveled the gun, but his hand shook badly from the strain he had placed on his muscles. He squeezed the trigger and missed by more than a foot. The Black Bat whirled. His own guns came up. The crook gave a screech of terror and threw his weapon away. He raised his hands, sobbing surrender.

THE BLACK BAT had no time either to question or examine the hunchback. That single shot would draw every patrolman in the building to the roof. He scooped up the rope that he had used to lower himself into Hollis' office and to haul himself back to the roof again. It was provided with a strong hook.

He ran to the rear of the building, fastened the hook in place and then swore softly as he saw the hunchback trying to find his gun in the darkness again. The Black Bat could have shot him down. but he didn't even reach for his guns. Those weapons spoke only in self-defense.

A moment later, four patrolmen barged out on the roof. More followed. One of them pointed. Near the edge of the roof was a stooped figure, clad in black and he seemed to be wearing a cape that billowed out.

"The Black Bat!" one of the men yelled. "Take him! Alive!"

They started forward. The figure was trapped completely. He raised a gun. It lanced flame and one patrolman slumped against a pipe and slid to the roof. The others held guns ready and now they didn't hesitate. The guns roared.

The black-clad figure straightened up, staggered back a step and hit the low cement parapet. He swayed and then pitched over the side. A long, wailing cry trailed after him. One of the patrolmen turned away, covering his eyes.

"That was the Black Bat," he said slowly. "What if he was a little on the wrong side of the law? He never hurt a cop yet and he helped us plenty."

"Yeah," another patrolman said. "But we had to do it. I guess he'd rather have gone out this way than be unmasked. Here comes Lieutenant McGrath. Will he be happy—the big lug!"

McGrath listened to the excited story of the patrolmen. He walked over to the edge of the roof and looked down. When he turned around, his face was harsh, but his eyes were moist.

"No question but it was the Black Bat?" he asked.

"How could there be?" one man challenged. "We saw him clearly enough. All dressed in black with something that looked like a cape. Sure it was the Bat."

McGrath gulped. He couldn't face his own men. Now that it had come and the Black Bat was really dead, things seemed different. The Black Bat's taunts, his stickers in the form of a bat plastered everywhere he appeared on the scene of a crime, all seemed inconsequential. McGrath almost felt as though he had lost a friend who could never be replaced.

"Well," he said finally, "we'll go down and see who he is. Not that I have any doubts. Then I'll go over and tell Tony Quinn's man what happened. Damn it, why couldn't you mugs have grabbed him?"

McGrath didn't wait for an answer. He reached the street, ran around the huge building to its rear court and found a number of men there. He looked for signs of the corpse and found none.

"Where is it?" McGrath demanded. Fierce excitement gripped him. "Where's the Black Bat's body?"

"Black Bat?" someone said in an awed voice. "Gosh, Lieutenant, there wasn't any corpse here. We thought we heard somebody yell and then there was a thud like a body makes when it hits the cement, but, see for yourself, there's nothing here."

McGRATH shrugged. "Then some of his pals must have been with him. I always suspected he didn't work alone. They carried the body away. Well, I'm on my way."

McGrath reached his car, piled in and drove quickly to Tony Quinn's home. He parked, but he didn't get out of the car right away. Once he dabbed at the corner of his eyes with his handkerchief and then he blew his nose lustily. Best to get it over with, he decided. But telling Silk of his master's death was no different to McGrath than announcing a similar tragedy to a widow and family of nine kids. He walked slowly up the path, rang the bell and slowly removed his hat as Silk opened the door.

"It's you, is it?" Silk barked.

"It's me," McGrath said. "Silk, I've got bad news for you. I know I've been tough on you and Quinn. I know I swore never to rest until the Black Bat was in a cell or dead. Now I wish I hadn't said those things. You see..."

"What are you jabbering about?" Silk asked. "Say, McGrath, are you sure you feel all right?"

McGrath nodded. "Fine, thanks. I mean—oh, damn it, Silk, Quinn is..."

A voice from inside the house reached McGrath clearly.

"Silk, if that's Lieutenant McGrath's voice I hear, let him in. Why must you two argue all the time?" Lieutenant McGrath's jaw fell, his mouth opened wide. He gulped and stumbled into the house. He stepped across the study, looking at

With a wailing cry, the figure of the Bat hurtled through space.

the man who sat in his accustomed chair in front of the fireplace, as though he were seeing a ghost.

"Are you here, Lieutenant?" Quinn asked. "You're walking oddly. What's wrong?"

McGrath sat down on the edge of a chair as if he wanted to get up and run. He licked his lips. twirled his derby and tried to talk. Only a wheezing sound came from his lips. Someone touched him and he jumped nervously.

"Skittish as a cat," Silk grunted. "It's just me—with a drink. You look as though you need one."

McGrath took the glass, gulped its contents and felt better. He leaned forward.

"Quinn, I apologize. I'm sorry for all the trouble I ever put you to, because now I know you are not the Black Bat. The Bat is dead! He fell off the edge of a roof thirty-some stories above the ground. His body is missing, bu no man could live after a fall of that kind!"

Quinn's face grew serious. "Are you certain, Lieutenant? The Black Bat dead! Why, it's hardly believable. I thought nothing on Earth could kill that man."

"Neither did I," McGrath said. "But I also thought you were the Bat, which goes to show how great fools men can be. Well. I apologize once more, Quinn."

HE stretched out his hand, but Quinn's sightless eyes never flickered. McGrath looked slightly abashed, dropped his proffered hand and turned away.

"Oh, Lieutenant," Quinn said, "what is new on those hunchback killings? Commissioner Warner told me what happened to Hollis and Kilpatrick and I'm interested."

"Not sure," McGrath grunted. "Two more men were robbed and by hunchbacked crooks, too, but they weren't killed. I think some bunch of crooks is cashing in on the publicity and disguising themselves like hunchbacks. Elmer White and Ed Johnson were the new robbery victims and they were both so damned scared they couldn't remember much about anything that happened. See you later, Quinn."

He left the house, got back into his car and started the motor. He was still thinking of that figure which had plunged to a grisly death. He'd have to do something about locating the corpse, but he decided he wouldn't tackle the proposition too belligerently. The least he could do for the Black Bat was to let his true identity remain secret.

McGrath reached for the gear shift on the wheel. There was something foreign to his touch there. He peered down and his face went alternately white and crimson: He threw back his head and bellowed a series of curses. Then he shook his fist at Quinn's house, jammed his hat down and dropped his voice to a monotone.

Plastered on the surface of the gear shift was one of the Black Bat's stickers! As McGrath drove away, a bulky form moved from behind the protection of a tree. Butch O'Leary's shoulders were shaking, his eyes running with tears of laughter.

CHAPTER VI
Orders for Action

BACK in Tony Quinn's library, things moved serenely. Silk puttered around. Quinn stared straight ahead with those dull, blank eyes of his. Once, when Silk passed close by, Quinn spoke.

"Don't draw the shades yet. McGrath may come back. I'd have given a lot to see his face when he spotted that sticker."

Finally Quinn rose, yawned and stretched his arms. It was well after midnight. Using his cane, he tapped his way across the room. Silk began extinguishing lights. Five minutes later, Quinn crossed the room again, this time with the sure footedness of a cat. Darkness meant nothing to him. He touched a switch and paneling swung open. He stopped into his laboratory, waited a moment until Silk joined him and then, as the panel closed, Butch's roar of laughter filled the small room.

"Honest, boss, McGrath was so mad the windows in his car rattled at the way he cursed. Boy, oh boy, I've never seen a man so mad in my life."

Carol held Tony Quinn's hand tightly. "I was there, darling, in the crowd watching that building. We saw someone fall off the roof and I—I was so certain it was you. Oh, Tony, I thought I'd faint or shriek your name. I don't know what prevented me from giving the whole show away."

Quinn smiled tenderly at her.

"I do. It's called courage. The man who tumbled off the roof was one of the hunchbacked killers. Some of his pals must have whisked his body away so he wouldn't be identified. I killed or wounded a couple of them and they were taken away, too. Perhaps the gang is composed of well-known criminals and unmasking one may reveal the whole set-up.

"I slid down my little rope to three stories below the top floor. I opened a window, slipped into the office and phoned Silk to get things ready. Then, after the police were either all on the roof or on the top floor, I used a private elevator, reached

the cellar and got away. Fortunately, the coupé was parked nearby."

"What did you discover?" Silk asked. "What's it all about, sir?"

Quinn shook his head slowly from side to side. "I don't know, yet. In fact, I haven't even a suspicion. They are after something of great value. Hollis had one of the things they wanted. He must have discovered he was the owner of it, because he rushed to his office at night and put something in his big safe. It looks as though he didn't trust his wall safe at home.

"That means the hunchbacks who murdered Hollis only *thought* they had gotten what they came for. When they discovered it was missing, they traced back on Hollis' movements, went to his offices and broke open the safe. I heard them take whatever it was out, but I couldn't do a thing.

"If I'd so much as taken a deep breath, they would have filled me full of holes. I was badly stunned by the force of an exploding grenade, too, so I just had to lie there and let them get away with it."

Butch scratched the back of his neck.

"I asked a million questions, Boss. Nobody seems to know anything about these hunchbacked guys. They must be new in town."

"And you, Carol?" Quinn asked. "Did you discover anything about Hollis or Kilpatrick?"

"Not much. Hollis and Kilpatrick were both ardent hunters. They used to spend whole seasons in Africa and India. But I'm sure neither of them knew one another, except casually. They were financially independen, honest and noted for their philanthropies.

"Hollis' sister gets his estate. Kilpatrick's goes to some rooting-tooting playboy who spends all his time falling off polo ponies and into heart balm suits. I saw him, and I wasn't impressed. To me, Jim Downing looks like a two-legged, white-skinned edition of a skunk."

Quinn lit his pipe and puffed slowly on it.

"All of which adds up to nothing. Now there have been two more of those robberies by hunchbacked men, making a total of nine breaks. Fortunately, this time, the victims were not murdered. Why? If I knew the answer to that, I'd have a slim lead. Why should two men die and the others be permitted to live?

"And those hunchbacked outfits, that's what they are—outfits! There must be a significant reason why those killers operate in such grotesque disguises. Silk, hand me my regalia. The night is still young. I'm going to find out about Elmer White and Ed Johnson, the latest victims of the gang's terror."

CAROL gasped and half rose.

"Tony, did you say Elmer White and Ed Johnson? Wait, just a second." She fumbled in her purse, drew out a small notebook and rapidly consulted it. "Tony, I knew those names were familiar. Listen to this!

"Grant Hollis and Robert Kilpatrick donated several valuable specimens of jungle life to a museum. I went there to see if I could get a line on them. I happened to notice that several other people had donated similar specimens. Elmer White and Ed Johnson were among them!"

Quinn whirled around. "And the others, the five victims who were robbed after the murders?"

"They were not among the donors," Carol answered. "But if the four I mentioned are significant, we can tie them up with certain dates. They and three other men donated the most recent specimens. The other three are Geoffrey Thomas, the broker, Dr. Hugo Norden, the surgeon, and Alex Pierce, the jeweler. All of their specimens came from somewhere in India."

Quinn faced Silk. "It's time for you to get busy. Adopt a simple disguise. Find out all you can about those three men. Get into their homes. even if you have to act like a burglar to do it. Examine everything in their trophy rooms. That means bookends, vases, statuettes, pictures, keepsakes, anything.

"Butch, you cover Silk in case he gets into a jam. Carol, you stay by the phone as contact agent.

"There is no time to lose! The hunchbacked killers may strike again, and if Carol's hunch is right, Thomas, Dr. Norden or Alex Pierce will be the next victims."

Silk hurried away to don a disguise. His thin face and bald head were especially adapted for the purpose. In twenty minutes, not even Lieutenant McGrath's scrutiny would have detected any similarity between Silk Kirby and the man who slipped out of Quinn's house.

Silk now wore a black wig. He had darkened his skin, made his cheeks puffier and his nose broader. He dropped his usual very erect posture and assumed a slouching walk. He hailed a taxi, looked around before he got in and saw Butch behind the wheel of a sedan half a block away. Silk felt considerably relieved. Butch was a handy man to have around if serious trouble started.

Inside the laboratory, Quinn had donned his regalia and was sliding bullets into the firing chamber of his twin guns. He thrust these into their holsters, stepped over in front of Carol and placed both hands on her slender shoulders.

"Carol," he said quietly, "some day we'll find time to think of just ourselves. I know how you

feel because I feel the same way. But so long as there is crime and violence abroad, we've a job to do, if for no other reason than to honor and respect the memory of your father who gave me back my sight."

"Yes, Tony," she said and her eyes were wide and honest. And I'm not afraid. Good luck! I'll go back to my apartment now and wait for further orders."

SHE held open the trapdoor and he vanished into it. The cheap little coupé was parked nearby. Quinn didn't wear the Black Bat's hood, nor the cape. They would have attracted too much attention. Instead, he had donned a floppy-brimmed hat worn well down over his eyes to conceal the scars which would have given away his identity to the newest rookie on the police force.

Oddly enough, his course took him in the direction of Police Commissioner Warner's home. He drove by, noticed that a night light had been left burning in the hall and that the garage doors were open. The Black Bat parked his car well out of sight. Twenty minutes went by and then Warner's car turned into the drive. He rolled to a stop in the garage, got out and shut off the lights. Then Warner's hand darted toward his hip pocket.

"No need for a gun, Commissioner," a calm voice said in the inky darkness. "This is the Black Bat!"

Warner couldn't see the Black Bat, but he recognized the voice.

"I'm glad you came to see me," Warner said. "Things have been happening. How much do you know about the case so far and how did you evade Lieutenant McGrath at the Hollis Building?"

The Black Bat chuckled.

"McGrath will have to figure that out. About these hunchback killers, I know very little. That's why I'm here. You said things happened. What?"

"Two more robberies," Warner sighed. "Thank heaven no one was killed. I'm firmly convinced these men are a cleverly organized, masterly led group of criminals intent on looting the richest families in the city. Tonight, they robbed Elmer White and Ed Johnson."

"And in every case the loot included not only cash and gems, but odds and ends, like bookends, statuettes, tobacco jars and other knick-knacks?" the Black Bat asked gently.

"Yes, every case," the commissioner groaned. "Two of the families, robbed soon after the murders, even lost silverplate. Now what kind of an organized gang bothers with that stuff? It's more trouble to hock than it's worth!"

"Did you," the Black Bat's voice came out of the darkness," know the five families who were robbed immediately after the killings? Was any member of those various families known to be a big game hunter?"

"Big game hunter?" Warner asked in a puzzled tone. "What has that to do with it? No, I don't think they were. But wait, the two most recent victims—White and Johnson—they are known as sportsmen. Why did you ask that? Is there some connection?"

There was no answer. Warner waited a moment, turned on the lights of his car and then shook his head slowly. The Black Bat was gone! Warner sat down on the running board of his car.

"He's as badly stumped as we are. This is one case in which the Black Bat is bound to fail. Not the barest clue and for once, I think Lieutenant McGrath is right. The first two victims of the gang were murdered simply as an example to others that the hunchbacked gang was not to be opposed. Hollis' dying words that I heard over the phone, meant nothing—were just the incoherent shouts of a man who knew he was going to die."

Warner walked slowly toward the door of his house. He was badly worried. There were bound to be repercussions soon. The victims of the gang were all wealthy, influential people and they had a right to squawk. Orthodox methods of running down the gang were useless. Warner found himself praying that the Black Bat would get a lead and wade into that outfit with blazing guns. Warner didn't very often countenance violence nor the wanton breaking of the law, but those hopes still persisted.

CHAPTER VII
Death Will Be There

ILK in his disguise, attracted no attention as he walked down the quiet, elm-lined street where Geoffrey Thomas had his home. Silk ambled by the place and noticed there were no lights burning. That made his task just a little easier.

To carry out the Black Bat's instructions, he would have to perform some high class burglary, invade the house and search it. Silk knew that the Black Bat was working on theory alone, but that was enough for Silk. Those theories of his usually seemed to bear fruit.

Silk decided on a bold course. He walked up on the front porch and rang the bell.

When the butler or servant would arrive, he was ready to ask some logical question about the neighborhood, to keep the servant so busy that he wouldn't notice Silk's manipulation of the door lock.

SILK

Then, after the household settled down again for the night, he'd merely open the door at his leisure, walk in and have a look. There would be no trace of an intruder then.

Silk heard two-toned chimes peal somewhere deep in the house, but no one came in answer to his ring, even after three or four minutes went by. Silk took a flashlight from his pocket, walked softly to a window and sprayed the light into a room. The furniture was covered with protective cloths, the rugs rolled. Geoffrey Thomas and his family were apparently not in town.

Silk grinned now for his task had become comparatively simple. He examined the lock, tested several master keys which he carried and finally he stepped into the reception hall. He closed the door behind him, masked the ray of his light with the palm of his hand and walked into the spacious living room.

There was an ornamental desk in one corner and mail was stacked high on it. He consulted postmarks and discovered that Thomas must have been away for over three weeks. Apparently, he was on a trip and didn't have his mail forwarded, leaving it for some servant to put away. There was a box, about ten inches square. placed alongside the mail. Silk picked it up.

Then his eyes happened to rest on the desk drawers. They were all open and their contents bad been hastily pried into. Silk gulped. The hunchbacked burglars had beaten him to it. He glanced at the package he held, saw that it was addressed to Geoffrey Thomas and that it carried some odd-looking stamps. There was a return address in the corner and he tried to make out the small letters.

He heard a stealthy sound behind him, as though someone were brushing against the covered furniture. Silk turned his head quickly, raised the box he held and hurled it straight at the two men who were ready to pounce upon him.

In one quick second, he saw that they were hunchbacked, their faces were well covered by black scarfs and they had guns drawn. He reasoned that they wouldn't shoot except as a last *resort for any undue noise in this neighborhood* would attract police in droves.

THE two men ducked the flying missile and Silk whirled. He streaked toward the front hall. Two shadowy fonns seemed to rise up out of nowhere. Silk didn't stop. He merely lowered his head and changed his flight into a lunging charge. He hit one of the shadowy forms a terrific blow and sent the man back on his heels. The second figure swung a gun butt and missed Silk's head by a fraction of an inch. Then Silk was sprinting across the hallway toward the door.

Silhouetted against the windows on either side of the exit, were two more of the hunchbacked men. Silk skidded to a stop, turned and headed for the stairway. His only chance now lay in creating enough of a rumpus to give Butch warning that he was in trouble.

Silk managed to reach the top of the stairs with two of the hunchbacked killers trying to grab his ankles. There was a huge ornamental vase on a pedestal set against the balustrade on the second-floor landing. Silk gave it a vigorous shove and the heavy object crashed against the bare floor below. It made a terrific racket.

He veered to the left and shot through a doorway into a bedroom. He slammed the door in the face of a cursing killer. and shot the bolt home. Then he turned on his flash and took stock of his predicament. He groaned. because now he noticed that he had virtually trapped himself. When he glanced out of the window, he saw two more of the weird killers lurking outside in the darkness.

Someone was already trying the door and a harsh voice gave orders. Silk berated himself for not taking along a gun. Yet he had expected nothing like this and if he ran into any trouble, he didn't want to be armed. Silk usually depended on his own smooth ways to get himself out of a jam.

Silk picked up a chair and sent it hurtling through the window. That made noise enough. Butch was bound to hear it. Everything depended on him now and Silk fervently prayed that he wouldn't attempt to cleanup this mob of killers alone. Now he had to use his wits and try to bluff it out. Silk moved toward the door.

"I give up," he said in a gruff, sullen tone. "I

ain't heeled so don't start shootin'. I'll open the door."

He turned the key and was hurled back by the force of two men who catapulted into the room. A pair of guns prodded Silk's ribs. He kept his hands stretched high and he gaped at the men who surrounded him. Then he let a bitter laugh escape his lips.

"Imagine it," he groaned. "I figured you guys owned this joint or were servants or something. Instead you're in the same boat I am—a bunch of crooks. Why didn't you sing out?"

"Quiet, you," one of the men snapped. "The rumpus you raised may draw the cops and if they come, you won't be here to meet them—on your feet."

SILK gulped. He had a vague idea he wasn't fooling these men. Five minutes went by and then he heard someone running up the stairs. It was another of the hunchbacks.

"Okay, boys, nobody heard the window bust. Everything is under control. What'll we do with this bird?"

"Hold him and find out who he is," another of the partially masked and grotesque-looking men snapped. He turned to Silk and fastened steely fingers around his throat.

"Talk, you rat. You were trying to warn somebody, a plant outside. No burglar would have gone to all the trouble of busting a big vase and a window. What were you looking for? Who sent you here?"

Silk couldn't answer because those crushing fingers prevented him from even taking a breath. The fingers relented a trifle.

"F-for anythin' worth takin'," Silk managed hoarsely. "Say, what's the idea of gettin' so damn' high hat? You're a bunch of crooks same as me. I ain't done nothin' to you lugs!"

The hunchback who seemed to be in command of the others, stepped back a pace and turned the ray of a flashlight full on Silk. He studied him in silence for a moment.

"I wonder if this bird is just a second-story mug. He looks stupid enough to be, but you never can tell. Maybe he works for the Black Bat. There are ways of finding out. Tie his wrists behind his back. Somebody get the car ready. We'll go out the back way."

Silk placidly allowed them to bind his wrists. Just so long as he could stall, that was all that might be necessary. Butch hadn't blasted his way into the house yet so he must have used his head for once and gone to warn the Black Bat.

They led Silk down the stairs watching him narrowly every second. He was pushed out the back door and the house. No wonder he hadn't noticed any signs of intruders. Their getaway car had been boldly housed in the garage.

Silk climbed into the back seat. He noticed that while he had observed eight hunchbacked men in and around the house, only six got into the big car. He wondered where the other two had gone.

Then he noticed another significant thing. One of the hunchbacked men carried a satin sack and it contained an article just about the same size and shape as the package Silk had been examining when they burst in on him.

The car pulled out of the driveway, without headlights and slowly, so as to arouse no attention. Its powerful motor made a minimum of noise. The driver turned left and Silk had a momentary glimpse of Butch's car parked near the curb. It was empty and his heart rose in elation. Butch had gotten himself clear. Now if he was only close by to take up the pursuit.

They headed for the outskirts. Two of the hunchbacks held a whispered consultation. One of them exposed a gun.

"How about telling us who you are, sucker?" he snapped. "How come you were in that house and who sent you there?"

"Like I said," Silk protested weakly, "I was doin' a job on the place. Only I picked it wrong because there wasn't anythin' worth swipin'."

THE gun racked across his face, drew blood and made Silk wince in pain. The weapon was slowly being raised again. The next blow would knock him cold and there was nothing he could do to prevent it.

"When you wake up," the hunchback snarled. "you'll remember this sock and then maybe you'll talk or get some more of the same treatment."

Silk tried to roll away from the blow, but he was cramped between the bulky forms of his captors with no room to move. The gun barrel slammed against the top of his skull and he folded up.

He awoke as he was being dragged across a cinder path. He opened his eyes and saw that he was being taken into what seemed to be an isolated farmhouse. A run-down place with boarded-up windows and no lights. He could hear night insects chirping and never once the noise of passing cars. He shuddered despite himself. This was complete isolation where anything could happen.

Someone unlocked the front door. Silk was dragged through, for he still pretended to be unconscious. They threw him into a chair and someone slapped him smartly across the face. He feigned coming out of a coma. The eerie-looking man who led this pack applied a match to a lamp.

Then he flipped the still lighted match at Silk's face.

"Still going to give us that phony yarn about being a second-story guy and working alone? Don't bother to say yes, because I know you'd be lying. You had a pal, didn't you? A big bruiser of a guy who was parked down the street from the Geoffrey Thomas place. He hid when we passed by, but he came out fast enough and followed us here—the big dope. Listen, stupid, for the last time—who sent you to that house and why?"

Silk shook his head stubbornly, although his rising hopes had been dashed to pieces. They knew that Butch had followed them here. They'd set a trap for him and Butch didn't possess the brains to avoid it.

"Kind of a tight-lipped guy, ain't you?" the hunchbacked leader snarled. "We'll take that out of you damned soon. I got one more question to ask. If you don't answer it right, it's curtains. Do you work for the Black Bat?"

"Who? Me?" Silk put the proper amount of outraged surprise in his voice. "The Black Bat! Say I'd earn fifty grand if I could put a bullet through his back. Not me! Say, you guys don't work for him, do you?"

Two of the men laughed. Their leader silenced them with a wave of his hand.

"You're pretty smart, pal. Maybe you don't work for the Bat, but we're going to find out. He'll go through hell and high water to save his friends so he won't mind coming here to save you. Only you won't be here and—Death will."

CHAPTER VIII
Ghostly Command

PARKING within easy sight of Geoffrey Thomas' house, Butch watched Silk enter. Minutes went by. Then Butch heard a muffled crash and sat erect. A couple of minutes later, a window crashed and Butch vaulted out of the car. He headed toward the house, curling his big fingers into mighty fists as he did so.

There was a high hedge running around the estate, but as he passed the break which permitted the driveway to go through, he came to an abrupt halt and dropped to his knees. He had caught a glimpse of two hunchbacked men lurking in the darkness behind the house.

"Silk's in trouble," Butch told himself grimly, "and I can't do anythin' about it because the Black Bat says I gotta report what happens before I wade in!"

Minutes crawled by. Once Butch saw one of the hunchbacked men step out on the sidewalk, look around hastily and then duck back out of sight. At last, something happened. He heard a garage door open and then a car starter whirred. Tires grated on cement and a big sedan slipped out of the driveway.

Butch didn't see Silk inside, but he was certain he must be there. The big man merged with the darkness and waited until the car was well down the street. Then he darted toward bis own car, got it into motion and started as careful a pursuit as he could manage.

He drove without lights and allowed the car he trailed to remain well ahead.

When they headed out into the country, he was certain that Silk must be a prisoner. The chase was easy, too easy—although Butch never thought of that. His mind was centered on one thing—to keep the car in sight, learn its ultimate destination and phone the news in to Carol.

He braked the car suddenly and stopped. He slipped out, ran forward with an amazing speed for a man so big. The sedan he followed had turned off the highway and rolled along a narrow country lane. It topped a grade and vanished. Butch topped that grade too and dropped flat. In the glare of the sedan's headlights, he saw two men drag Silk out and pull him toward the house.

Butch's jaw clamped shut hard and a low growl emanated from his lips. They weren't treating Silk too gently and he seemed to be unconscious. He wouldn't be the only one with a busted head once Butch returned from reporting this information.

He hurried back to the highway and sent his car streaking eastward. He recalled that they had passed through a small town on their way here. On the outskirts of the village, he saw beckoning lights. A lunchwagon was open. He parked beside another big car, entered the lunchroom and went directly to the phone booth.

BUTCH, intent on his important mission, didn't notice two men enter right behind him. One ordered coffee. The other sauntered up toward the booth as though to wait for Butch to finish his call.

The lone counterman, busy getting the coffee, didn't see the man press his ear against the thin paneling of the booth and then raise his hand in a signal to his companion. Butch had a notebook listing Carol's phone number and he consulted it briefly. Then he had Carol on the wire.

"Listen close," he said. "I ain't got much time. Silk is in trouble. They got him in a farmhouse at 67. You pass through Flaggsport, watch your mileage and just five and six-tenths miles after

you pass the sign that says 'Come Again' is the lane. Got it?"

"Got it, Butch. Go back and see if you can help Silk."

"I'll go back and bust a few heads," Butch growled.

He hung up, stuffed his notebook back in his pocket and opened the booth door. There were two men waiting for him, on either side of the booth. He caught the glimpse of a gun, shown for his express benefit. Then one of the men wound an arm around his shoulders.

"If it ain't our old pal. Say, this is great. We got a car outside. Take you any place you want to go."

Butch opened his mouth to argue and a gun jabbed his ribs. His arms were gripped and he was led out of the lunch cart.

"In the car," one of the thugs told Butch. "You're a big lug, but we got a nice little chunk of lead that will whittle you down to our size."

Butch got into the car, waiting and hoping for the slightest relaxation of vigilance so that he could wrap his hands around the necks of these men and smash their skulls together. That chance never came. After the car was well away from the town, the man beside him poked his gun under Butch's nose.

"Let's see that notebook from which you took the phone number, sap. Give, hear me?"

Butch brought out the notebook, because there was nothing else he could do.

The thug flipped the pages and found Carol's number.

"So this is your pal's phone number, huh? Swell. We'll give him a ring later on in case he don't show up at the joint where we're taking you. If he does. you'll have to phone hell to reach him again."

The car rolled at a fast speed back to the isolated farmhouse. Covered by two guns, Butch walked into the place and was immediately surrounded by a squad of hunchbacked killers. They pounced on him.

Two minutes later, he was firmly tied and able to move only by hopping across the floor. Butch was forced into another room. He saw Silk seated and well guarded. Butch let go with an audible groan. Silk merely looked at him as though he were a complete stranger.

THE leader of the hunchbacked men eyed them malevolently. He stepped up to Silk and struck him across the mouth with the back of his hand.

"So you are just a plain crook, huh? How come then, that this big gorilla followed us here and then made a phone call to a third party, huh? Well, you know what this means."

He shouted a command and all the occupants of the house assembled before him.

"These two"—he indicated Silk and Butch with a wave of his gun—"are to be taken to the barge. Get both cars out and we'll start as soon as we finish setting a nice little reception for their friend. Haul up the stiff, one of you guys. We'll arrange one swell party for the guy who'll come to save these chumps!"

Two men carried a corpse up from the cellar. It was thrust into a chair, tied in place and Silk's coat placed over its shoulders. The hunchbacked leader surveyed the set-up critically.

"Perfect. Everything is set. Let's go!"

Silk and Butch were dragged to their feet and propelled out of the house. The hunchback leader remained behind for a few moments and when he emerged, he carefully closed the door behind him. Silk, standing beside Butch, gave him a nudge with his elbow. Immediately both of them began struggling furiously.

A gun butt crashed down on Silk's head and he dropped flat. He seemed to be writhing in the path, but in reality he was digging up the cinders as much as possible. Butch, straining against the ropes that bound him, shook off two savage pistol butt blows to the head, gave a howl of rage and lowered his head. He butted the nearest man in the stomach, doubled him up in a spasm of agony and then turned to tackle another.

The hunchback leader drew a blackjack from his pocket, maneuvered himself behind Butch and crashed it down. Butch passed out without a whimper. They were hastily loaded into separate cars and driven away. When they recovered consciousness later, Silk sniffed the odor of the river. Loose boards of an old pier rattled under the automobile tires. The cars stopped.

There was a dirty-looking barge tied up at the pier. Butch was thrown into it bodily and Silk followed. The killers scrambled down a rope ladder. A tug, with steam up, began pulling the barge away.

Silk and Butch were taken through a concealed door in the side of the hold. They found themselves in a cramped room and encompassed by pitch darkness as the door closed.

"We're in a mess," Silk said loudly. "These crazy guys seem to think we got a friend who'll help us. That's a laugh."

"No, it ain't," Butch whispered. "It's bad, Silk. Awful bad. They heard me phone Carol. They even got her number and they'll trace it. Don't look so good for her either."

Both men subsided into silence. There wasn't much to say and it was dangerous to speak. They could feel the barge moving rapidly and

heading into midstream.

"Looks like we feed the fish," Silk said finally. "Try those ropes again, Butch. You always bragged no rope could hold you!"

Butch strained against his bonds until the muscles in his neck stood out like iron bands.

"Yeah," Butch relaxed, "but I never met these kind of ropes before. No use."

A DOOR, facing them, opened and the hunchback leader entered. His eyes, above the black scarf, glittered evilly. Three of his men filled the doorway to watch. The hunchback drew a knife, held it near his hip and slowly advanced toward his victims.

"Here it comes, suckers," he said. "This is where we part company—for good. We got plenty of old scrap iron on deck to weight you down with. You'll never come up again."

Silk took a long breath and steeled himself against the searing slice of the knife. It came forward slowly, for this hunchback had an overwhelming amount of sadism in his makeup. He would draw out the agony as long as possible. The knife touched Silk's throat and he felt a tiny rivulet of blood run down his neck.

It was too late now—even for the Black Bat's interference. Silk's life was numbered in seconds.

Then, very abruptly, the hunchback withdrew the knife. He was looking over Silk's head as if some mysterious presence had suddenly appeared. He put the knife away reluctantly and backed up a pace.

"Changed my mind," he muttered "It's just possible you guys work for the Black Bat. We got to keep you alive until we're sure he's done for. He's slippery and may get out of the little trap we set, so the fishes will have to wait!"

The door closed and Butch gave vent to a long drawn-out sigh of relief. Silk was frowning deeply.

"Butch, did you see that? He was ready to slit my throat and—something stopped him—something we couldn't see. Those words that hunchback spoke were not his own. He was merely repeating what someone else had just told him."

Butch gulped noisily. "You mean ghosts?"

"I don't know," Silk answered slowly. "I can't figure it out. Those hunchbacks are under the orders of someone they fear. A certain party was right. There is a guiding mind. Butch, try those ropes again. Keep trying. I'll see if I can wiggle over beside you and reach the knots. We've got to work fast. Once Carol transmits your message, it may be too late to prevent that trap from being sprung."

CHAPTER IX
Black Bat Rescue

WEALTHY Alex Pierce was a man of about forty, but he looked ten years younger. Slim and neatly dressed, he possessed a professional air that never left him.

He was pacing the floor of his living room nervously. His hair was rumpled and a cold cigar rolled between his teeth.

Finally, he walked over to his desk and sat down. There were eyes watching him. Outside the house, four hunchbacked killers were crouched below two windows. One of them raised his hand in a signal. They all crept softly toward the front of the house, stole up on the porch without making a sound and flattened themselves against the wall close to the doorway. Then one pressed the bell.

Pierce arose abruptly, flung his cigar into the waste basket and hurried to answer the bell. He opened the door, saw no one and made a bad mistake. He stepped out on the porch. Instantly a hand was clapped across his mouth and his arms were pulled savagely into a position from which there was no possibility of extricating himself. Strong-muscled arms dragged him back into the house and the door was gently closed.

The hunchbacked killers flung Pierce into a chair and one of them pointed a gun at his temple.

"Don't move, sucker," he rasped, "unless you want to feel a slug bust you wide open."

Pierce licked his lips and remained rigid as a corpse. He watched the hunchbacked killers search his desk and take several jewel cases. These were dropped into a satin sack. Another of the thieves located the wall safe. Pierce gave the combination after the gun was pressed hard against his head.

They opened the safe and looted it. Then they picked up a cigarette box on his desk, appropriated that and selected a large ornamental cigarette lighter. Pierce watched a small paperweight, in the form of an Oriental idol, get dumped into the sack.

The quartette of crooks seemed to have completed their work. Two of them started for the front door. At that moment, every light in the house winked out. Then an eerie form with outflung wings like a bat darted across the hall and into the big living room. A gun blazed. The new invader had two weapons in his fists and both of them opened fire simultaneously.

One of the hunchbacked killers gave a wild yell and slid into a heap on the floor. Two of the others streaked for a window at the rear of the room, shooting to cover their own retreat. Alex

Pierce half rose from his chair. The hunchback beside him brought down the butt of his gun in a vicious, murderous blow. Pierce moaned and tumbled out of the chair.

The hunchback jumped over his form and raced through the darkened room in the wake of his two pals.

One of the men scooped up a foot rest and hurled it through the window. Then each of the killers dived into the protection of the night outside the house. Bullets struck dangerously close, for the man in the house was shooting fast. Then the night swallowed up the three men.

When the lights were turned on again, Alex Pierce was just opening his eyes. He saw a hooded and caped figure bending over him and he drew away in horror.

"Don't be afraid," the man said quietly. "I'm not one of those hunchbacks. I'm the Black Bat!"

Pierce sat up and rubbed his head.

"Thank heaven you came in time. They were going to kill me. I'm sure of it. How did you know they were here?"

THE BLACK BAT laughed. "I didn't. I came to pay you a little visit, which must be cut short because someone will have reported the shots. I saw what was going on, took the liberty of opening your front door and messing up the house with bullets. Sorry, but I did nail one of the killers. While I examine him, I'll ask you a few questions. Answering them may help me run down these crooks."

The Black Bat moved to the hunchback sprawled on the floor. The man was dead. The Black Bat stripped away the scarf which concealed the killer's face and revealed a thin, pimply-faced little rat of a man. But the Black Bat didn't stop with that. He lifted the corpse and stripped off the man's coat. Something fell to the floor with a hollow sound. He picked up a papier-mache hump.

"Fake," the Black Bat exulted. "I was certain that members of this gang couldn't all be hunchbacks. Perhaps they wear these outfits as a sort of grisly uniform. Now Mr. Pierce, what did they take from you?"

Pierce was on his feet, wavering a little and mopping some of the blood out of his hair.

"I'm not sure. There were some jewels in the safe and about two hundred dollars in cash in my desk. I know they took that. Then—why, look at my desk! They stole half a dozen practically worthless objects. My cigarette case, a paperweight...."

The distant wail of a siren warned the Black Bat that he had little time left. He approached Pierce and the eyes glittering behind that mask were very serious.

"Mr. Pierce, this is a strange question but it must

The hunchbacked men stalked into the living room.

be answered. Did you ever do any big game hunting in Bahawal, India?"

Pierce gaped for a moment.

"Why, yes—yes I did, about a year ago. My trophies are in a room upstairs. What in the world has that to do with this?"

"Perhaps nothing." The Black Bat stepped close to the dead man again and pasted a Black Bat sticker on his forehead. "I'll brand the corpse to let the police know I killed him. Then they won't hold you. And now, I'm following in the tracks of the hunchbacks. I can hear police cars stopping at the curb already. Good night, Mr. Pierce."

As the Black Bat spoke, he walked briskly toward the door and the light switch. Suddenly, the room was plunged into darkness. Pierce thought he felt something pass very close to him. Then police pounded on the front door. He opened it and Lieutenant McGrath, leading a squad of detectives, swarmed into the house with drawn guns.

"I'm glad you came," Pierce managed to talk after half a minute. "Th–there's a dead man in my living room. One of the hunchbacked murderers. They robbed me, possibly fractured my skull. I need a doctor."

McGrath shouldered Pierce aside, headed into the living room and stopped to turn on lights. He walked over to where the corpse lay, took one look and let out a yell.

"Why didn't you tell me the Black Bat was here? Outside, men. Scour the neighborhood. Broadcast an alarm for the Black Bat. He can't be far away. Now, Pierce, what happened here?"

"The Black Bat came. He asked me a lot of questions. He prevented four of those devils from killing me. The Black Bat began shooting and this—this man fell dead. But it was self-defense. They were shooting too. You can see bullet holes in the walls. The Black Bat had to kill this man."

"Yeah," McGrath looked down at the dead man. "Yeah, he always has to kill 'em and the mugs who fall by his gun are always rats, like Lewis here. We been hunting this weasel for weeks.

"Well, we got a lead about these hunchbacks at last. Phony too, huh? Fake humps to make 'em seem more vicious, I suppose. Okay, Mr. Pierce, you'll have to make a statement about this, but that sticker on Lewis' cheek proves the Black Bat did the job. You got nothing to worry about."

BEFORE McGrath was inside the living room, the Black Bat had reached his car. When orders went out to create a dragnet, he was far beyond its scope, riding along sedately so as to attract no attention.

The nose of his car was pointed homeward. It was about time for Silk and Butch to report. Also, with McGrath on the war path it might be well if he was at home in the event that the doughty detective-lieutenant decided to check up on Tony Quinn.

Moments later, the Black Bat slipped through the gate, crossed the lawn to the garden house and made certain he was unobserved. He raised the cleverly hidden trapdoor, started to slide down the ladder and paused.

Ordinary eyes might have noticed the small slip of paper tacked to the under side of the door, but ordinary eyes would never have been able to read it in this darkness. The Black Bat did and his face went grim beneath the hood. It said:

S. and B. in trouble. S. taken to house at end of lane off Highway 67. The turn is exactly five and six-tenths of a mile beyond the south line of Flaggsport. B. called a second time and asked me to meet him. Good luck!

The Black Bat read the last line again and his heart missed a beat. Butch had phoned a second time asking Carol to meet him? But Butch wouldn't have done that. not when Silk was in trouble. He'd have dusted straight back to the house where Silk was held. The Black Bat knew exactly how Butch's mind worked.

"Someone else phoned Carol. They're getting close to me, to Tony Quinn," he muttered. "She may be in danger, too, and I can't help her. My only lead is this farmhouse."

He closed the trapdoor softly and darted back to where he had parked his car. This time he sent it racing madly toward the outskirts. Now he cared nothing for interference from the police. His friends were in deadly peril. They depended on him alone to get them out. The Black Bat's foot was like a ton of steel on the gas pedal.

CHAPTER X
Death Deferred

OUTSIDE of Flaggsport the Black Bat looked for the town line, found it and also saw the "Good-bye" sign swinging gently in the early morning breeze. He checked his speedometer, leaned on the gas pedal again and went racing off into the night.

He covered the five-odd miles in less than that many minutes, braked savagely and spotted the lane. He turned the car off the road, concealed it under low branches of a big oak and climbed out. He checked his guns as he raced toward the crest of a slope. He slowed up as he reached it, saw the solitary farmhouse nestled in a small valley and

made a half circle of the place so that his attack would come from the rear.

There was a weak light burning on the first floor, but no other signs of life. The Black Bat observed the place intently from the protection of high grass and then he darted like the wind across the cleared space, reached the back door and stood very quiet. listening. Nothing stirred within.

He went around to the front of the house with a heavy heart. He had no way of knowing how long it was since Butch phoned in the news of Silk's capture. Both of them might be dead inside, or they may have been taken to some other hideout.

He glanced at the cinder path and then knelt hastily. He saw the tracks indicating that one man had been dragged toward the house. He crept forward a little and saw signs of a terrific struggle. Had that taken place as the prisoners were led into the house, or when they were being taken away? The Black Bat's super-sensitive eyes traveled off the cinder path to the softer dirt at its shoulders. There he saw Butch's huge shoe tracks imbedded clearly. The toes pointed away from the house. They had been taken away then.

Yet, even if they were no longer prisoners inside, the Black Bat's only chance to rescue them lay there. He had to find some clue. There was sheer desperation in his movements now.

He found the front door ajar about a quarter of an inch. He gave it a shove and discovered that it was an exceptionally heavy door. Something hit the floor with a clang. He looked down. It was a thin bar of metal which had held the door open. The Black Bat sensed that this was some kind of a trap. Gun in hand, he stood there.

He raised his head and looked into the house. Then his spirits dropped to a new low. There was a long corridor running through the house. At the far end, he could see a sinister object seated in a chair. It was a man, either dead or unconscious and that man wore the coat which Silk had donned as part of his disguise.

The Black Bat stepped into the hallway and let go of the door. It closed with a clanging sound, but he paid no attention to this for he was rushing along toward the last room in the house. He reached it, stopped beside the man in the chair and raised his head. Then he emitted a sigh of relief. It was a corpse all night, a badly crushed and battered cadaver—but it was not Silk! The Black Bat had an idea this was the man who had tumbled off the roof of the Hollis Building.

THE BAT tensed. There was a low hissing sound from somewhere nearby. It sounded like gas being forced by high compression from a tank. He whirled around and things began to spin. There was no odor, but whatever that gas was. it had a sinister potency. The Black Bat found that he was reeling and staggering along. Then a sudden wave of horror struck him. Hardly realizing it, he discovered that he had fallen and was trying to climb to his knees. Every muscle and nerve seemed utterly paralyzed. He summoned all the strength he possessed, but even that wasn't enough. The Black Bat slowly sank to the floor. He wasn't unconscious, but that stage was rapidly approaching.

Then he heard a pounding noise, and at first he thought it was his own heart. But the wrench of wood being parted by some instrument indicated that help was coming. The Black Bat couldn't move, but his eyes were open and they still functioned. He could see through the darkness. He watched one of the heavily boarded windows being opened. Just a little air—a little cool, life-giving air would save him. Sweat poured down his face, soaked his clothing.

A dark blob of shadow filled the window for a moment. Then the person in whom the Black Bat placed hopes for his life, straightened up. He was very short and inclined to be pudgy. He wore his hat low above his forehead and his coat collar was turned up. And a curved knife glittered in his hand.

The Black Bat wondered why he couldn't see this man's face. Then he noticed that the newcomer held a handkerchief against his nose and mouth. He knew about this gas then. Was he coming in to finish the job? The knife hand raised high. The man crept forward confidently.

Then the Black Bat saw no more. Merciful unconsciousness gripped him. His last thought was that everything was ended now. Yet it wasn't, for the intruder lowered the blade a moment later, knelt beside the Black Bat and uttered a sharp cry. Without wasting another second, he slipped an arm under the unconscious figure's waist, hoisted him up and slung him over one shoulder. The man was small but apparently very strong, for he carried the Black Bat easily.

He went straight toward the window he had forced open, slid the Black Bat's body through it and then exited himself. Outside, in the darkness, he again picked up his burden and carried him twenty yards from the house where grass and shrubbery was thickest.

He laid the Black Bat down gently. straightened the Bat's arms and legs and then bent over the unconscious form of the hooded man. His face was a study in conflicting emotions as he reached out to remove the hood and reveal the identity of the Black Bat....

CAROL Baldwin, in the security of her little apartment, slowly hung up the phone after Butch had called. She didn't know where to contact the Black Bat nor when he would find an opportunity to call her. He might even return home first, and Silk needed help badly. Carol didn't hesitate any longer. She hastily wrote a note outlining Silk's predicament and the location of the hideout. She was pulling a jaunty little hat when the phone rang again.

She answered it eagerly, hoping to hear Tony Quinn's voice. Instead, it seemed to be Butch again and he was very excited.

"Something else just turned up. It's necessary that you meet me at once. Go to the corner of First Street and Millbrook Avenue. Dark and quiet there. Expect you in thirty minutes."

Before she could answer, he hung up. Carol added a postscript, tucked the note in her purse, left the apartment and slipped around to the side of Tony Quinn's estate. She fastened the note on the under side of the trapdoor, returned to the street and walked briskly away. She took a cab several blocks from there and gave directions which took her to within a quarter of a mile of the rendezvous.

But something inside Carol seemed to be warning her, a sixth sense that repeated over and over again to be careful. She tried to recall the second phone conversation word for word. "Necessary that you meet me at once." That didn't sound like Butch. The voice seemed to have been his, but not the words. He had either read a prepared dialogue to her or someone must have imitated his voice.

Yet she wasn't certain and at this stage she couldn't afford to take a chance in not keeping the appointment. The corner was dark and dismal—a perfect spot for a murder or a kidnapping. Carol was anything but a coward, yet she felt a terrific urge to cut and run for it. Then a reassuring sight met her eyes. A patrolman, nightstick swinging to match his stride, came sauntering up the street. Carol waited until he approached and began eyeing her suspiciously.

"Officer," she said, "someone is following me. I'm nursemaid for Mrs. Loring's two children and I'm afraid they may force me to let them in the house so they can kidnap the children. There have been threats, you know."

The patrolman nodded briskly, for Carol had basic material to her bluff. There had been threats against the wealthy Loring family and they did live only a matter of a few blocks away.

"Where are they?" the patrolman asked. "How many were there?"

"Two, I think," Carol said.

The cop's face went grim and he loosened the gun in its holster. "Okay, lady, you keep on walking home just like nothing happened. I'll trail along. Dugan, the cop on the next beat, is due here in a minute or two. We'll handle the tough guys if they start anything."

Carol glanced at her wrist-watch. It lacked about four minutes of the half hour alloted her. She nodded to the patrolman and began walking very slowly toward the corner. She heard a car rolling down the street and its headlights were out. Carol reached the corner and stood there. The car pulled up and two men jumped out. They separated to cut off any possibility of retreat on her part.

A gun roared. One of the men stopped abruptly. His left leg buckled under him and he went down to the pavement, drawing a gun as he did so. He managed to lift the weapon, but he never pulled the trigger. Two service pistols went into action. The wounded man simply dropped flat. The other wheeled and raced back toward the car. Bullets slammed into the machine. One flattened a tire, another perforated the gas tank. Two patrolmen came up warily.

The second crook and the driver surrendered. protesting wildly as to their innocence. One of the patrolmen searched the men and found them armed.

"Innocent, are you?" he growled.

"My eye! There will be radio cars here in a minute. Dugan, keep watch on these punks while I see how bad the other one is."

"Okay," Dugan said and he kept looking around. "Now ain't it just like a girl to get scared and run away. Oh well, we know where to find her and these buckaroos will get a nice stretch anyhow for traveling heeled."

CHAPTER XI
Stymied

CAROL had ducked hastily when the shooting began. She watched the arrival of two radio cars. Then a detective cruiser howled up and the prisoners were taken away. She didn't wait any longer. By cutting through a yard, she reached the parallel street, spent ten precious minutes trying to spot a taxi and finally hailed one. She had herself driven past Flaggsport and she paid off the driver near the lane Butch had described.

Carol ran along the lane, stumbling and almost falling several times, for the rutted, stony road was never meant to be traveled in high heels. She topped the ridge and spotted the house in the valley. It was dark and sinister-looking, reminding her more of a tomb than a residence.

Her heart more than kept pace with her running steps. She knew that Silk was, or had been there. Probably Butch was a prisoner in the place, also. It was even possible that Tony might have been taken. Carol unlatched her purse and removed a small twenty-five calibre automatic. She pumped a bullet into position, released the safety catch and kept on going.

Then suddenly, she veered off the lane and crouched in the tall grass. Someone was coming out of the house through a window. In one brief instant, she had a glimpse of the Black Bat's hooded head and his ribbed cape. Her heart sank, for the Black Bat was being forced through the window head first and he appeared to be dead.

She checked the impulse to rush to his side when another figure scrambled out of the window. She saw this man lift the Black Bat and carry him away from the house. Carol moved forward carefully. From a vantage point on the side of a hill, she could watch, in the graying dawn, all of the unknown man's actions. She saw him lay the Black Bat down gently and then reach up for the hood.

Carol raised her gun skyward and yanked the trigger. The little automatic made a flat report that wouldn't have been heard very far, but the unknown man heard it.

He straightened up, jumped over the Black Bat's prostrate form and began running madly toward the forest growth behind the farm.

Carol rushed down to where the Black Bat lay.

She dropped to her knees beside him and held her breath as she lifted one limp wrist and placed her fingertips gently against the pulse. He was alive! His eyelids were moving.

She raised the Black Bat's head, and when he recovered consciousness, he blinked at her as though he saw a ghost.

"It's all right, darling," she told him.

"Everything is all right. Are you badly hurt? Shall I get you a doctor?"

The Black Bat sat erect and pressed both gloved hands to his temples. He managed a wan smile.

"Just an asphyxiating gas. Soon as the world stops spinning like a top, I'll be all right. I... Carol, how did you get here? Did you see a small man with a big hat? He was in the house, ready to knife me."

"The little man carried you out here, darling," Carol told him.

A WAVE of relief passed through her. When the Bat asked questions, there wasn't much danger of his having been badly hurt.

"He was going to unmask you." she continued, "but I fired a shot into the air and frightened him off."

"Silk and Butch?" the Bat queried. "And you, Carol? You really did write that note I found pinned to the trapdoor? I thought someone might have guessed the identity of the Black Bat because that note lured me into one of the neatest traps I've ever seen."

"I wrote the note," Carol explained. "Butch phoned me and described this place. Then another call came and I suspected it was a trap for me. I was right. It's getting light. We'd better go back."

"With Silk and Butch in trouble?" the Black Bat asked. "No, Carol. We've got to find them. Help me up. I'm going back in that house to look for clues. There must be something to give us a lead. You go back to the highway. The coupé is parked under a big tree just north of the lane. Drive it here."

He was wobbly on his feet for a few minutes, but he soon had another window ripped away so that there was cross-ventilation to air the house. Then he climbed through a window, lit a lamp and found the gas cylinder. Its contents were exhausted. He also located the mechanics of the trap. The door of the house had been made extra heavy and a spring closed and locked it after he had entered. The closing door also operated the mechanism which had turned on the valve of the gas cylinder.

He examined the corpse still seated in the chair, but the dead man offered no clues. He started a complete search of the house. A closet caught his eye. Inside, he discovered several articles of clothing. A slicker, an oil skin hat and knee high boots. He appropriated these.

Carol had the coupé waiting. They drove back to the city fast. They made their way, unobserved, into the estate, used the tunnel and reached the laboratory.

Quinn sent Carol into the kitchen to make coffee. Without removing his somber clothing, he set to work at once. He scraped some white spots off the slicker and put them through a simple test. Then he studied the hat intently and finally tackled the pair of boots. Carol brought a light breakfast into the lab and Quinn ate hastily and told her of his findings at the same time.

"The slicker was coated with residue from sea water. Both the hat and coat are those of a sea man. The boots were literally imbedded with pieces of copper drillings. There was some rope strands fastened to the instep, too, the kind of hemp that is used for tow lines at sea.

"Carol, there's one answer to this. At least one member of the hunchback gang works aboard a barge. That barge was recently loaded with copper

drillings and that shouldn't be hard to trace. The copper shows no signs of oxidation so it must have been carried via the barge from some big factory direct to a freighter. probably intended for trans-ocean voyage to Europe. Copper is an important commodity over there right now."

HE turned to finish the breakfast. "But how can you be sure Silk and Butch are on the barge?" Carol asked.

"Because it's the very best spot in the world to hide them. Their captors must have guessed they were my agents, which means they won't be killed immediately. They'll be hostages until the gang can land the Black Bat.

"Our job now is to locate a barge which was recently filled with a cargo of copper drillings. That's your work, my dear. I can't do it, not in broad daylight, and we can't afford to waste one minute's time. I know how tired you must be, but...."

"What's being tired compared to being a prisoner in the hands of those men?" Carol interrupted. "Tell me how to go about it and I'm on my way!"

Tony Quinn gave her detailed instructions and after she left, he changed to his tweeds and smoking jacket. He spent ten minutes tapping his way along the path beside his house, simply to show himself and arouse no suspicions. But windows in the house were wide open so he could hear the phone in case Carol called.

Two hours, the longest Tony Quinn had ever known, dragged by and still no word. Every passing minute meant that Silk and Butch were that much closer to death. Yet Tony Quinn displayed none of the anxiety that was running rampant in his brain. He made several complete circles around his house. Once, a police car rolled by and the siren wailed softly in a salute. Every cop in town knew Tony Quinn and respected him as a man who had suffered more than death to carry on a fight against those who broke the law.

Finally, he returned to the house, closed all the windows and resumed his usual chair in front of the fireplace. He tried to force the worry out of his mind by thinking over all the details of this bizarre case. Two murders so far, and why? How did it happen that Hollis and Kilpatrick were ruthlessly killed and the other victims permitted to live? How were these victims linked? By the fact that some of them had, in the past, been big game hunters?

Why were cheap, unimportant articles like bookends, cigarette boxes and statuettes stolen? How did those hunchbacked killers know when to strike and when to run for it? What had Hollis meant by that one word, Garland? Was it the name of a man? Certainly he couldn't have been talking of flowers, not with death staring him in the face. And the mysterious individual who had rescued the Black Bat! Quinn's brain couldn't sort the facts, yet. Perhaps Silk had uncovered something. If only Carol would call!

Tony Quinn wasn't used to inactivity when his two friends were in danger, but for one of the few times in his life he was completely stymied. His pretended blindness became a barrier which he was unable to hurdle. Yet there had to be some way of rescuing Silk and Butch.

THE doorbell buzzed. Quinn almost started up in alarm, Above all things he didn't want a visitor now. But there was nothing to do but tap his way across the room, open the door and stand there with his blank eyes staring straight over Police Commissioner Warner's head.

"Why, Tony," Warner said, "I thought Silk would be here to let me in. You don't look very well to me. Is anything wrong?"

Tony Quinn laughed.

"I'm as fit as a blind man can be, Commissioner. I'm very glad you stopped by. Silk is downtown doing some shopping. There's nothing new on those hunchbacked murder cases, is there?"

Warner took Quinn's arm and piloted him back to his chair in front of the fireplace. He sat down too, sighed and crossed his legs.

"Another robbery. Alex Pierce, the jeweler, this time. Fortunately for Pierce, the Black Bat showed up in time to save his life."

Through Quinn's mind ran the thoughts of a worried man. The Black Bat had saved Pierce but could he rescue his own two aides? Carol might phone at any minute. Immediate action might be demanded, and here, of all people, sat the police commissioner.

"I hope you don't mind my dropping in like this, Tony," Warner said. "I know you're a lonesome man and company does you good. I like to come here for a more selfish reason however. I can relax and forget about murders and robberies and hunchbacks. Or, if I have a mind to, discuss the cases with you."

"You're welcome at any time!"

Quinn smiled although he'd never felt less like smiling since the day when acid had been dashed into his eyes. Again and again he realized how each elapsing minute made Silk and Butch's peril greater. They might even be dead by now. And Carol? Why didn't she call? Had she fallen into some neatly laid trap too? Was this the beginning of the end for the Black Bat? Without his three friends, the Black Bat would find it hard to operate.

Warner tamped tobacco into his pipe, lit it and leaned back with a long sigh of comfort. Quinn

realized he might be here for hours and there was no possible way to get him out. He might plead he wasn't feeling well, but he knew Warner well enough to realize the man would then stay at least until Quinn's valet got back.

Then the telephone buzzed and Quinn sat erect with a startled ejaculation. Warner got up and pushed his chair back.

"No, please," Quinn said, "I'll answer it. You forget, Commissioner, that even a blind man becomes accustomed to the layout of his own home. I can find my way about easily."

Warner sat down again and Quinn headed toward the phone on the small desk near the door. His mind was working furiously. He couldn't talk to Carol here and it could be no one but her. Suddenly, he tripped over a small ornamental urn on the floor. He threw out both hands and came crashing down on the table. The telephone crashed to the floor with Quinn on top of it. Quinn's hands seized the wires and jerked them out of the instrument. Warner came rushing over to help him up. Quinn had an abashed grin on his face.

"Silk must have stuck that darned vase there by mistake. He always tells me when he moves anything. Will you pick up the phone for me?"

Warner glanced at the instrument.

"Sorry, but you ruined it, Tony."

Quinn headed for the hallway. "There's another one upstairs. No, don't come with me. Unless I keep going on as usual I'm apt to become too frightened to move about my own house. Please, Commissioner, go back and enjoy your pipe. I can manage very nicely."

QUINN'S cane tapped the way along the stairs. He stepped into a small room on the second floor, closed the door and sprang for the telephone. If only Carol hadn't hung up. She was still on the wire but extremely worried.

"Sorry I couldn't answer right away."

Quinn said, "Warner is downstairs and I had to do some fast thinking so he wouldn't hear me talk. What's up?"

"I pretended to be a reporter, as you suggested," Carol said. "I asked a lot of questions around the waterfronts about scrap metal being shipped to Europe and I found what you are looking for. A barge, named the Timothy Three, hauled a load of copper drillings yesterday. Last night, after midnight, the barge suddenly moved off, towed by a tug. It went up the river and it's now tied up at an old pier near the end of Carmody Street. I'll meet you there."

"No," Quinn countered. "I can't get rid of Warner but I have an idea. I've been thinking of a way of getting out with Warner around here. You phone the Reliable Yacht Company, give them my name and say I want a small yacht moored at that pier as quickly as possible. They base several of their demonstrators at a yacht club only a mile further up the river. I'll have to work in broad daylight and I'll need your help badly. Now listen carefully. Do just exactly this...."

Carol listened intently and laughed musically at the sheer audacity of the Black Bat's plan. Quinn hung up and made his slow way downstairs again.

"A salesman," he told Warner with a smile. "Not the ordinary kind. This one wants to sell me a yacht. He's got one tied up at a pier uptown. I've been thinking seriously about buying one so that I can get out in the air more. Have to wait until Silk returns so he can take me there."

"Why wait?" Warner said quickly. "My car is outside and you know I'm something of an authority on boats. I'll be more than glad to take you there."

CHAPTER XII
Daylight Rescue

DRIVING Tony Quinn uptown, Warner finally brought the car to a stop at the end of the pier. He helped Quinn out and the blind man stood quietly waiting for Warner to make the next move. A trim little yacht was tied up but Quinn's blank eyes gave no indication that he saw it—nor the dirty looking barge that was floating only a matter of yards away. One man sat in a chair on the afterdeck smoking a pipe, but watching Warner and Quinn very closely.

"Trim-looking little craft."

Warner approved. "Shall we go on board?"

"Might as well," Quinn said. "The salesman will drag us on board anyhow. See if you can raise him, Commissioner. I'll wait here for you."

Warner nodded, hurried toward the end of the pier and walked up the short gangplank to the yacht. He shook hands with a dapper-looking man who came out to meet him. Then Warner turned and called:

"I'll be after you in a minute, Tony. I..."

Warner suddenly stopped shouting. A woman's voice was yelling somewhere, yelling with the frenzy of grim terror. Warner and the salesman rushed to the starboard rail. Far out, past midstream, they saw a girl standing in a rowboat and waving her arms madly.

"Tony," Warner called. "Someone is in trouble. We're going to run this craft out to the rescue. Wait right where you are."

Quinn waved his cane in acknowledgment,

tapped his way back to the car and climbed into the rear seat. He noticed that the guard on the barge had suddenly vanished. It was more than probable that he had recognized Commissioner Warner and gone below to give the alarm.

Quinn didn't relax once he got back in the car. Rather, he took a quick look around, thankful that this part of the river was so deserted. He hastily removed his coat, put on the Black Bat's cape, slid a pair of dark trousers over his own tweeds and then donned the hood. He opened the door of the car, slipped out and ducked behind a run-down watchman's shack.

Certain that he was unobserved, he raced straight toward the barge. The Black Bat moved fast. Everything depended on swiftness of motion now. Without a pause he leaped off the edge of the pier and onto the deck of the barge. He headed toward a companionway and darted behind it when he heard someone coming up.

Two men appeared and while they exhibited no guns openly, the Black Bat could see the outline of the weapons thrust into their back pockets. He drew his own guns, reversed one of them and crept forward. One man walked over to the rail and watched the yacht maneuvering closer to the girl in the rowboat. The other remained close by the spot where the Black Bat was hidden. This man had no warning of danger for the Black Bat worked very quietly. He stepped up behind his victim and slammed the gun butt down hard. As the man wilted, he caught him, lifted him off the deck and deposited him behind the companionway out of sight of his friend.

The other crook turned around. saw that his mate had vanished and cursed softly as he made his way across the narrow deck. Then a gun jabbed against his ribs.

"Keep your hands by your sides and don't make a sound," a low voice warned. "How many others are below?"

"T-two," the remaining crook managed. "Wh-what's the idea?"

HE didn't speak further because a thudding gun butt dispatched him into a world of complete blankness. Then the Black Bat darted down the companionway ladder and gave a grunt at what he found below.

This was certainly no common garden variety of barge. The hold, into which cargo was dumped, looked big, but the builder of the craft had contrived to save plenty of room below. There were even two small cabins.

A man with a broken nose and a sour expression on his face backed out of one cabin. Backed out and into the hands of the Black Bat. A palm clapped across his mouth to check the cry of surprise. The gun drilled against his side gave notice that this was no picnic.

"Into the other cabin," the Black Bat ordered softly. "One word or move and I'll let you have it."

The crook gulped and obeyed. He had one glimpse of the masked man who had captured him and that had almost as much effect as the gun.

"The Black Bat!" he said hoarsely.

"Inside," the Bat answered. "Fast!"

He closed the cabin door quietly, forced his prisoner to remove a necktie and belt and then used these to tie the man up tightly. He left him lying on a narrow bunk.

"I'll be back," he said tensely, "if I hear the slightest noise out of you."

He stepped into the dark corridor, approached the second cabin and tried the latch. The door wasn't locked. He pushed it open a notch. His eyes lighted up for Silk and Butch were there, both cruelly tied up and haggard from lack of sleep and food. One man guarded them. He heard the latch rattle, turned on his heel and fired. The Black Bat's guns blasted a split second later and the killer doubled up.

The Black Bat drew a knife, cut Silk free first and talked fast as he did so.

"No time to answer questions. I'm with Commissioner Warner. It was the only way I could get here. Cut Butch loose. Then both of you get away from here as fast as possible!"

The Black Bat hurried on deck, darted across it and leaped back to the pier. He saw the yacht heeling over preparatory to its return to shore. The rowboat was in now and the girl who had been in it, stood beside Warner. The police commissioner came down the gangplank in a big rush.

"Tony," he called out. "Tony, what the devil happened? We heard shots."

He opened the rear door of the car. Tony Quinn sat there, his cane between his knees, an excited expression on his face.

"I heard shots, too. They seemed to come from down the river a bit. Oh curse the luck. I'm blind and I can't do a thing."

"We'd better get down there," Warner slid behind the wheel. "Your yacht will have to wait."

Warner spent twenty minutes cruising up and down the waterfront without getting much success.

"Hopeless," he told Quinn. "Couldn't have amounted to much anyhow or we'd have heard more excitement. Want to go back to the yacht now, Tony?"

Quinn shook his head. "I don't think so. Anyway, what's the good of me going on board?

You tell me all about it and that will make up my mind. By the way, what was going on? Was someone in difficulty on the river?"

"A fool girl who went for a row, and when she stopped to smear a little rouge on her lips, the oars dropped into the water. I didn't even ask her name and you can rest assured I didn't introduce myself. I'm not looking for publicity of any kind. Not now, with this gang of hunchbacked killers on the loose. Well, let's go back. I'm sorry it all turned out to be such a fiasco. Wish I could find out who fired those shots."

He stopped in the driveway beside Quinn's home. A door opened and Silk, immaculate and smiling, helped Quinn out of the car. He nodded to the commissioner.

"How was the boat, sir?" he asked eagerly. "Did you buy it?"

Quinn's face was deathly white, but he managed a smile.

"Not yet. Help me in, Silk. I—feel a bit dizzy. Too much excitement. I guess."

WARNER jumped out of the car and took Quinn's other arm. They put him in a chair and Warner went for a glass of water. Quinn took it gratefully.

Silk escorted Warner to the door. When he returned, Quinn had pulled down the shades and was stripping off his coat. Beneath it, his left shoulder was matted with blood.

"That gunman winged me," he smiled wanly. "I kept the robe and hood wadded against the wound as much as I could so the blood wouldn't leak through. Is Butch all right and Carol?"

"Butch is in the laboratory, sir." Silk was helping to bare the wound. "I'll get water and antiseptics, sir!"

Silk cleansed the wound very carefully.

"A bad nick, sir, but the bullet isn't there, luckily. I haven't thanked you yet for saving my life. They'd have murdered us tonight. Steady now, sir. This will sting a little."

Quinn winced as the powerful antiseptic cleansed the wound. He felt better after it was bandaged.

"Have a look around," he ordered Silk. "Then we'll adjourn to the laboratory."

Carol detected the stiffness of Quinn's arm the moment he entered the lab. He quieted her fears and grinned at her damp and bedraggled clothing.

"A perfect act," be said with a chuckle. "Warner fell for it as I knew he would. It gave me time enough to reach Silk and Butch."

Butch had a bad bruise alongside his right cheek and he kept rubbing it. There was some concentrated hatred in his eyes.

"Just promise me a crack at them birds," he grumbled. "Just one juicy crack at 7, and I won't ask anythin' else as long as I live!"

"You'll have it. I hope," Quinn said. "Now to business. Silk, did you carry out your assignment before they seized you?"

SILK nodded. "I did, sir. I broke into Geoffrey Thomas' house and found that he was out of town and has been for weeks. His mail was stacked up and—listen to this—there was a package on his desk with some peculiar-looking postage stamps on it. I didn't have time to read the return address, but those hunchbacked crooks took that package and nothing else. Maybe they'd searched the place before I arrived, but I'm sure they stole that package."

Quinn's eyes lighted up. "Our first clue, Silk, in the library is a treatise on stamp collecting. Go through the volume and see if you can pick out pictures of the stamps you saw. Take all the time you need and be absolutely sure of yourself."

Silk hurried out. Carol was stuffing Quinn's pipe full of tobacco. She handed it to him and applied a match while she talked.

"Tony, that strange man who saved you from being killed in the farmhouse. Who could he be? He was no more than five feet one or two. Why did he save you and then try to see who you were?"

"I don't know why he saved my life," Quinn answered thoughtfully. "Raising the hood to observe my identity was a perfectly natural thing for him to do, however. He'll tum up again. We're sure of one thing—the hunchbacked killers are not really deformed. Their apparent afflictions are fakes and they are known to the police as crooks and killers.

"We have suspects, but nothing really to pin them down with. Jay Fenner, the attorney, is crafty enough to deal his cards from the bottom of the deck. Then there is Jim Downing, Kilpatrick's nephew. From all reports he'd be quite capable of turning crooked if there was a nickel of profit in it for him. That stranger who rescued me has possibilities too. I have a feeling our main clue is connected with big game hunters and I'm going to run it down as soon as we're all rested."

"Perhaps," Carol suggested, "they knew one another better than we think and during one of their expeditions they ran across something worth a great deal of money. Don't you think that's possible?"

"Yes."

Quinn admitted slowly. "But improbable, because it's practically a proven fact that these men did not know one another very well. If your

theory is right, our list of suspects is considerably longer for one of those men may be killing off the others so he can have the loot all to himself. It's a mess, and so far we've taken the brunt of everything. That band of murderers has had us on the run. From now on, we'll take the offensive. Butch, go back to your room and get some rest. Carol, you'll have to remain here until we can find you another apartment. Those crooks can trace that phone number and I don't want you in any danger. We'll rest until tonight and then—there'll be some action."

CHAPTER XIII
Dr. Norden's Mysterious Actions

QUINN sat alone in his study that night until Police Commissioner Warner came at nine, excited and worried.

"More of the hunchback mob's rotten work," he said before he sat down. "Within the last three hours four different homes have been invaded. Jewels, money and knick-knacks taken. Damn it, Tony, haven't you got some theory about all this?"

Quinn's fingertips beat a tattoo on the arms of his chair. He turned his head toward Warner and those blank eyes seemed to be looking about three feet to the commissioner's left.

"I have been giving this a lot of thought, Commissioner. I had a theory, yes. It revolves about the fact that there must be something in common between the victims. But what you've just told me now seems to explode such an idea. Several men might be related by some one thing, but as the list of victims grows, I'm beginning to doubt it. Why don't you assemble some of the men originally victimized? Edward Johnson, Elmer White, perhaps the cousin and heir of the murdered Kilpatrick."

Warner nodded glumly. "I thought of that, but these men don't even know one another so far as I can find out. However, I'll take your suggestion and have them at Kilpatrick's house tonight, at about eleven o'clock."

Warner stroked his chin for a moment and then he went on.

"If only there was some way of letting the Black Bat know of the meeting. I've an idea he'd know the exact questions to ask."

Tony Quinn's smile was enigmatic.

"It's said the Black Bat usually knows everything that goes on. He might be there, Commissioner. I wouldn't mind going along myself except that I'd be in the way. And, of course, I couldn't help with any questions because the whole affair is as dark as my blindness, so far as I am concerned. Did you, by any chance, hear more about the shooting near the river this morning?"

Warner nodded. "Just another headache for the department. A corpse with a couple of bullets through its heart was picked out of the river a couple of hours ago. We identified the man as a cheap little gutter rat and the time of his death was affixed as approximately that which corresponds to the moment we heard the shooting. The girl I helped rescue disappeared, too."

"Rather ungrateful of her," Quinn said. "Well, I wish there was something I could do. You know, Commissioner, it does me a great deal of good having you come here and discuss these cases with me. I know I rarely have much to offer in the way of a solution, but it gives me something to take up my time. Have you ever considered the old, old theory that the murders of Hollis and Kilpatrick may have been committed so certain heirs could come into their money?"

"Considered it?" Warner grunted. "I've run it to the ground. Hollis' heirs are out of the question, but Kilpatrick left his estate to a pretty shabby heir, a young fellow named Jim Downing. He's already managed to get an advance from the executors, moved into Kilpatrick's home and made himself quite comfortable. I rather think I'll call the meeting there, to see how Downing reacts to it."

"Good idea," Quinn said. "Let me know how it comes out."

Warner arose slowly. "I'll do that, Tony, and"—he uttered a little laugh—"if you should happen to meet the Black Bat, you might tell him what's going on."

Quinn used his cane to reach Warner's side and he walked with him to the front door.

"Always hinting, aren't you, Commissioner?" he chuckled. "Pretty soon you'll be as bad as Lieutenant McGrath!"

WARNER'S hand closed around Quinn's in a firm shake.

"The Bat's methods aren't exactly criteria to hold up before members of the police department, but everyone has to admit they get results. Sometimes I even wish he were on my payroll."

For ten minutes after Warner departed, Tony Quinn sat in his study smoking a pipe. Silk bustled around. Finally, Quinn gave softly spoken orders and Silk drew the shades. Quinn walked briskly over to the hidden entrance to his laboratory, opened it and stepped inside. Silk was immediately behind him. Carol and Butch were playing rummy

and with a rather stupendous score in Carol's favor.

"Warner just paid me a visit," Quinn explained with a smile. "I convinced him that some of the victims should be assembled in one place. Warner hopes the Black Bat will be there and that's what's going to happen.

"However, there is one man who should logically be next on the gang's list. I'm speaking of Dr. Hugo Norden. Like six of the other victims, he is a big game hunter and a traveler. It's the only thing that ties these men up. Therefore, I'm going to have a look at the eminent doctor and perhaps question him, if I get the chance.

"From there I'll go to Kilpatrick's home. That's where Warner is bringing those men together. There's nothing for any of you to do at the moment, but don't think I'm neglecting you. Sooner or later I'll need your help, and next time, Butch, perhaps we'll find an opportunity to let you use those hams of fists."

"I'll be waitin'," Butch declared, "and hopin'. Just say the word." Silk got out Quinn's regalia and helped him put it on. Then the Black Bat was off once more.

He reached the vicinity of Dr. Hugo Norden's residence and decided that before he interviewed the doctor, he'd try to observe him and get a line on his characteristics. From a dark spot, the Black Bat observed Norden's silhouette pass several times the windows of one room. He drew closer until he could raise his head and peer inside. The shades were drawn, but the window he selected was open an inch and the interior could easily be observed.

Dr. Norden was a man of about fifty-five with white-edged vest, professional glasses hanging from a silken loop and a neatly trimmed Van Dyke beard. Norden was a specialist with a very good practice and he was also a wealthy man.

The Black Bat saw him open a desk drawer, take out an opened envelope and scan the contents rapidly as though he'd read the words several times before.

THEN Norden rose with determination in every movement. He walked over to the fireplace, struck a match and applied the flame to the edge of the letter. He threw it into the fireplace, and, when the flames leaped high, he placed the envelope on top of the letter. He watched them burn before he returned to his desk. He opened another drawer, using a key to unlock it. There was a small fireproof box inside. He opened this and removed an object which the Black Bat couldn't distinguish. He thrust this into his vest pocket. walked into the hallway and put on his coat and hat. Three minutes later he was backing his car out of the garage.

The Black Bat waited until he was certain Norden wouldn't come back. Then he simply raised the already partly open window, climbed into the room and went immediately to the fireplace. One corner of the envelope hadn't completely burned and he could distinguish the postage stamp it bore. The Black Bat searched the house to guard against interruptions by servants, but he discovered that they were all out.

He drew his gun, walked over to the window and wrapped heavy velvet drapes around the butt of the weapon. With one blow he shattered the pane. Working fast, he extricated two large chunks of glass, returned to the fireplace and gently transferred the ashes onto one piece of glass. He placed the second on top of it, pressing the ashes down firmly. He tied these together.

The Black Bat returned to his laboratory. There, with Silk, Butch and Carol looking over his shoulder, he set about examining the ashes. The postage stamp was easy to make out. Silk saw it and gave a cry of astonishment.

"That's the same kind of a stamp as appeared on the package those hunchbacks took from Geoffrey Thomas' house. I'm positive of it."

"Great!" the Black Bat said. "It's from one of those small, independent states in India. Bring the stamp catalogue. We'll check it quickly now."

They pored through the fat volume. Silk's finger pointed to a stamp.

"That's it!"

"State of Bahawal," the Black Bat said slowly. "In India. We've got something here. I paid special attention to the trophies some of the victims brought back from their hunting expeditions. Each one must have visited India and the regions near Bahawal because they shot animals native to that section. The link holds. We were right!

"Unless this is pure coincidence, the other victims of the gang were nothing but blinds, to give the impression that no one clique of people were involved as victims."

"But what are they after?" Carol asked. "And why should they murder one man. torture and murder another, and then not harm the rest of them? If they have something the gang wants, all of them should have been killed, not just Hollis and Kilpatrick!"

"I've thought of that, too," the Black Bat admitted slowly. "It puzzles me, but there's an answer somewhere. There has to be! Perhaps I'll find it when I question the men Warner is assembling. That's our next move and I'm on my way."

"How about us?" Butch asked. "Don't we get to do nothin'?"

"Have patience. Before tonight is over, you'll probably enjoy pushing in a few faces. For the present it's a one man job:'

CHAPTER XIV
The Vanished Men

UPON the stroke of eleven, Police Commissioner Warner arrived at the home of the late Robert Kilpatrick with his police chauffeur. The heir and new owner let him in. Jim Downing wasn't particularly gracious about it.

"What's the idea of using my home for a precinct police station? Why didn't you have these men go to your office, Commissioner? I don't like it, I tell you."

"Who cares," Warner challenged, "what you like or don't like. Two men have been murdered. Almost ten homes robbed. A band of the most desperate killers I've ever known is on the loose and you refuse to cooperate. I don't mind telling you it makes your actions seem suspicious. Now take me to the others and less talk about the whole affair or the next time I see you it will be in a police station!"

Downing grumbled something uncomplimentary under his breath, but he led the way to a spacious living room. Warner recognized the men seated awkwardly around the room. There was Elmer White, owner of a chain grocery company and very wealthy. Ed Johnson, a manufacturer, sucked on a cold, ragged cigar. Alex Pierce. the jeweler, regarded Commissioner Warner with open animosity. He got to his feet and cleared his throat importantly.

"So it isn't a hoax," he said. "Now that you're here I'll tell you what I think of your methods. In the first place, I don't like detectives coming to my home and demanding that I meet you in this house. In the second place, I don't ..."

"Quiet," Warner barked. "I'll do the talking. There's a reason for disturbing you gentlemen. It concerns you. My duty is to prevent crime and to check it if it does get started. It's my opinion that the hunchbacked killers may pay you another visit. And next time, you'll be in the same boat with Hollis and Kilpatrick. Now will you all relax and listen to me? I've a few questions to ask!"

"Ask away," Elmer White shrugged. "I'll do all I can to help."

"A very commendable attitude, Mr. White," a quiet voice spoke from the further end of the room.

All eyes turned in that direction. The Black Bat was slowly advancing toward them. He held a pair of guns.

Jim Downing gave a squeal of terror, but he didn't move. The others were visibly affected by the arrival of this eerie crime-fighter. Warner cleared his throat and stepped forward a pace.

"What do you want?" he demanded hotly. He had to put on an act for the benefit of this audience. "How did you know we were here?"

The Black Bat's lips curved into a smile.

"I've been watching some of you gentlemen. When I found that you were all headed for this house, I decided it might be to my advantage to put in an appearance. You, Commissioner, will kindly remove the gun from your pocket and place it very carefully on top of the mantelpiece. I shouldn't want to shoot you!"

Warner obeyed docilely and then returned to the little group of astounded men. The Black Bat came closer, put one gun away and drew a straight-backed chair toward him. He straddled this and waved his automatic.

"Please make yourselves more comfortable. Answer my questions and you'll discover that by doing so, you'll be helping yourselves. First of all, Mr. White, when were you in Bahawal last?"

WHITE gaped for a moment. "Why, two years ago. I was a guest of the Rajah."

"So was I," Johnson interposed. "Now that I think of it, he mentioned that he knew you, Mr. White. Then"—Johnson's face lighted up—"you must have received news from the Rajah lately. Wait! I'm beginning to see things more clearly. Hollis and Kilpatrick also know the Rajah. There are a couple of other local men who were his guests, too. Mr. White, have you heard from the Rajah?"

White answered tensely. "Yes—yes, I have. Three days ago. A package came, containing a small statuette of some god of India. A letter followed. The Rajah asked me to keep the statuette for him, that he'd be in the United States soon and he'd explain everything."

"Exactly what happened to me," Johnson said excitedly. "My package contained a tiny temple in which incense is burned."

"Wait," the Black Bat broke in. "Before you go any further, let me ask this. Were those two objects among the bric-a-brac stolen by the hunchbacked men?"

"Yes!" White and Johnson replied simultaneously.

"I never thought much about it because the temple he sent me wasn't a particularly valuable piece of property," White went on.

The Black Bat rose. "Now think carefully, you two. While you were house guests of the Rajah, did he ever mention anything called a garland?"

"Garland?"

The man tumbled forward as a bullet crashed into him.

White shot out of his chair. "What a fool I've been. Yes! Yes! The Garland! I even saw it and ..."

There was a single shot, the sound of breaking glass and the horrible impact of a bullet against human flesh and bone. White spun around like a top, hit the chair with his thigh and then slumped to the floor. There was an ugly bullet hole through his skull. White had never known what hit him.

The Black Bat's second gun appeared as if by magic. Both weapons blared twice, aimed directly at the window through which the murder shot had been fired. Then hell broke loose. Windows were caved in. Doors opened and a horde of hunchbacked men invaded the house. The Black Bat's gun came down, fired and the electric light switch across the room was smashed by the slug. The house was plunged into complete darkness.

"Duck!" the Black Bat yelled. "Everybody down—out of range."

He whirled toward the living room door and pumped a couple of shots toward it. The flashes of his gun gave away his location and he had to move fast after he pulled the trigger. The hunchbacked men were shooting back and some of their slugs came unhealthily close. Warner had made a leap toward the mantelpiece and his gun at the instant the light winked out. His weapon went into action also, but there were too many of the killers.

Edward Johnson, cowering behind a big chair, felt a light touch on his shoulder. Before he could yell in horror and surprise, the Black Bat's voice whispered an order:

"Watch the window directly in front of you. When I open it, run across the room and dive through. Dive, do you hear? If you attempt to crawl through, they'll kill you. Alex Pierce made it. So can you! Ready?"

"Ready," Johnson whispered.

THE BLACK BAT stepped away a few paces. He saw in the darkness clearly and counted eight hunchbacked killers. There would be more outside. but with Elmer White dead and Alex Pierce safely out of the house, their only objective could now be Johnson. Jim Downing couldn't possibly know very much about the case.

The Black Bat fired point blank at two of the killers. He also noticed that they traveled always in pairs. He broke up one team, for his aim was true. As they began shooting in the direction of his gun flares, the Black Bat leaped toward the window he had indicated to Johnson.

He slid it wide and pulled the curtains aside. Then he pumped a couple of more bullets in the general direction of the killers. Johnson caught his signal, held his head low and went streaking across the room. He launched himself through the air and sailed through the window in a perfect dive. No shots came from outside and the Black Bat breathed again in relief.

Warner had emptied his gun and was frantically trying to reload it. There was no sign of Jim Downing. The Black Bat's weapons only held a couple of more bullets apiece and be knew better than to stand and fight it out with his enemy outnumbering him so tremendously. He reached Wamer's side.

"The window! I'll hold them back."

Warner nodded and made his way to safety. The Black Bat held his two guns rigidly beside his hips. Four of the killers were trying to penetrate the darkness at the far end of the room. Two were on the floor, groaning in pain. Two others guarded the door.

The Black Bat launched a violent attack at these latter two. He blazed them aside with lead, slammed an empty gun against the face of the one nearest him and streaked into the hallway. He reached the front door, opened it and slammed it shut again.

But he didn't go out. Instead, he went racing lightly up the stairs to the second floor. He took refuge in one of the bedrooms, ran over to the window and looked out.

He muttered a low curse and hastily reloaded his guns. Two more of the hunchbacks were standing near the garage and a third man had his back against that small building, with his hands stretched high. The Black Bat recognized him as clearly as though the sun shone on him. It was Lieutenant McGrath and he was at the mercy of those men.

The Black Bat raised a window gently, slid out to a slanting roof over the back porch. He whizzed down the incline, off it, and landed lightly on the grass. He was up in a second. The two men who held McGrath at bay, whirled on him.

The Black Bat's guns blazed as fast as he could pull the trigger. One of the killers doubled up. The other gave a shriek of terror and raced away into the night. In a moment, the Bat was at McGrath's side, pressing one of his automatics into the detective's fist.

"I'm trusting you to do the right thing," he hissed. "There are half a dozen of those killers still inside. Warner is at the front. You take the north side and I'll cover the rear and the south."

"All right," McGrath agreed. "But this is only a truce. Soon as it's over, I'll stick you up with your own gun. You're no better than those hunchbacked murderers inside."

The Black Bat thumped him on the back so hard that McGrath almost lost his balance. As they took their stations, four of the killers emerged from the house to look for the Black Bat.

They split in pairs, as usual. But then, the Black Bat saw an amazing thing happen.

ALL four of them stopped suddenly and remained transfixed for a moment. Then, as one man, they rushed back to the house. The Black Bat waited five minutes and no sound came from within. Warner prowled toward the rear of the house and McGrath came from the other direction.

"What the devil happened?" McGrath growled. "They went back inside. I think we ought to go after them."

"Wait!" Warner ordered crisply. "There's help coming. A radio car crew heard the shots and I sent them for more men. Here they are now. This is one time the crooks pulled a boner. We've got the place surrounded. I'm giving orders that no man is to try and stop you, Bat. Just for this one time, mind. I could drop handcuffs on your wrists right now if I chose, but you did save my life at the risk of your own."

They headed for the house. A score of patrolmen responded to the alarm and they all closed in. McGrath and Warner opened the front door, guns ready. Eight men entered behind them. They searched warily, but in vain. After half an hour, they gave up. There wasn't a soul in the house except themselves. Even the dead and wounded crooks were gone.

"How could it happen?" McGrath raged. "And where's the Black Bat?"

"And how did you happen to come here?" Warner parried. "I didn't give you orders to follow me!"

McGrath looked a little sheepish, but he defended himself stoutly.

"I figured maybe the Black Bat would show up. Anyway, you've got to admit I used my head. That is, until two of those devils shoved guns under my nose. Know what they intended to do? Shake me down, riddle me with lead—until the Bat showed up."

"They got away, somehow," Warner groaned. "Nothing more we can do here. Four of you men go to Edward Johnson's house and guard him. He got clear. Anybody seen Jim Downing?"

Nobody had. While the police cars left the scene and patrolmen dispersed the crowd that had assembled outside the house, Lieutenant McGrath went prowling again. He was forced to work in darkness for the lights were still out and the two hunchbacks who had captured him had taken his flashlight.

A hand tapped him on the shoulder. He swiveled around, gun extended. He could see no one. Then, steely fingers closed around his gun wrist and the weapon was taken from him.

"It's only me," the Black Bat's voice announced. "I happen to need that gun, Lieutenant, and you might decide to call the truce off, now that the killers have escaped."

McGrath's chin stuck out.

"Okay, the truce is off. I know you saved my life, but that's neither here nor there."

"Most unappreciative," the Black Bat laughed quietly. "Now I'm afraid we're finished here. I can tell you this—watch Edward Johnson. They may try to kill him next, or Alex Pierce. And look for Jim Downing. He vanished as completely as the crooks."

There was a swishing sound near an open window. McGrath headed for a more orthodox exit, the front door. Two minutes later, he was driving off.

But McGrath had been skillfully duped. The Black Bat was still in the house and well hidden behind the thick drapes hanging on each side of the window.

The hunchbacked killers had tricked Warner and McGrath, but the Black Bat didn't give up so easily.

When six or eight men went into a house, they had to come out again and detection was certain if they tried to escape. Therefore, they must still be here. The only answer was a secret room of some kind. Had Jim Downing known of it and taken refuge there, too?

CHAPTER XV
Escape from Doom

FOR a period of ten minutes the Black Bat maintained his vigil with every sense attuned for the first signs of the killers. Now, at least, he had some semblance of an idea as to what they were after. A mysterious garland, the property of a weathy Nabob of India. The Black Bat knew the fabulous fortunes some of these potentates wrapped up in some small articles which particularly suited their fancy. He quietly reloaded both his pistols as he waited.

Then he heard soft footsteps on the floor above. Someone was coming down the stairs on a mission of surveillance. It was one of the hunchbacked killers with a gun in his hand. He searched the first floor, peered through the windows.

Then the others came. There were seven of them on their feet. One was carried between two of his companions. Another walked with a limp and was obviously in great pain. Now the Black Bat could distinguish the leader by his size and shape. He was pudgy and not very tall, but he walked with the grace of a panther.

The leader stepped aside at the back door and watched his men file out to vanish in the darkness. He stopped the last man.

"Back upstairs and be sure that secret door is closed tight. We may have to use it again some day. I'll meet you outside."

The last man hurried back. Before he was at the top of the stairs, the Black Bat was after him. He watched the hunchback enter a normal-looking bedroom, proceed directly to a blank wall and touch a hidden spring. A narrow slit in the wall slid back. The killer seemed satisfied as he reclosed the door. He turned around to hurry back to the others, but he didn't get far. A figure, as eerie as his own weird form, stood before him.

"Take off that outfit," the Black Bat ordered in a whisper. "Don't make any noise and no stalling, or I'll shoot!"

The hunchback shivered and obeyed promptly. The Black Bat opened the secret room, forced his prisoner inside and tied him up securely.

"I'll let the police know you're here," he comforted the man. "No danger of your starving to death. Thanks for the outfit, and pleasant dreams."

He closed the door. removed his cape and stuffed it under his clothing. Then he drew on the disguise of the killer, fastened the false hump in place and pulled down the broad-brimmed hat to conceal his hood. He wrapped the black scarf around the lower part of his face and then hurried to the first floor.

"Took you long enough," the hunchbacked leader snarled. "Come on. The boys dug up a couple of hot cars. They're waiting."

The Black Bat followed the leader, got into a sleek, fast-looking sedan and they rolled away. There were three others of the disguised killers in the car. No one spoke. The driver headed downtown, carefully avoiding the busier streets. The man who sat beside him held a sub-machine gun across his lap and kept his eyes peeled for trouble.

HOWEVER, there were no mishaps and the car turned into a modern, well-equipped garage. The doors closed behind it and the sedan went into low to negotiate the climb up the winding, steep ramp. It came to a stop on the top floor and everyone piled out. A man, garbed as a mechanic, stood by examining the sedan.

"Wait half an hour," the leader snapped. "Then have one of the boys roll her into the river."

The Black Bat kept to the rear as much as possible and he was already laying out his plans for a fast escape in the event of trouble. He was in a dangerous situation. Capture now would inevitably mean unmasking, being identified as Tony Quinn, ex-district attorney—and then death.

He followed the others into a spacious room fitted up with makeshift fumiture. There were two doors leading off it. The wounded men were already taken away, probably to some gangster physician. The Black Bat counted fourteen of the hunchbacked killers assembled here. The very size of this mob indicated that the loot would run well into the millions, because these men would have to be well paid even after the mysterious figurehead who guided them had his huge slice.

The leader took the center of the floor. No one unmasked, no one spoke a word. "Well, boys," the leader said, "we rubbed out White just in time. Too bad we didn't get the Black Bat, but this time White was most important. He was all ready to spill the dope. We now have five of the articles. We know where the sixth is located—unless the man I put on Dr. Norden's trail has slipped.

"Before morning, we'll have the last one and then you get your cut. We break up and the job is finished. There can't be any failure, because you men have been carefully chosen and you do not know one another. It is impossible for anyone to squeal.

"Now, for the details of our last job. It's a ticklish one, but it must be done. By this time tomorrow we'll have disbanded. Each one of you will have more money than you've ever seen in your lives before. We have until two A.M. to get the job finished, so listen closely."

The Black Bat held his breath. It was coming now. In half a minute he'd know everything with which this bizarre case was concerned.

But the leader didn't start talking again. Instead, he seemed to have gone into a trance. Suddenly, he turned on his heel and walked toward one of the closed doors. He opened it and then turned around.

"I'll give the instructions individually. Line up. One at a time you'll file into this next room and get the dope."

The men obediently got into line. The Black Bat found himself near the tail end. They filed in, singly and spent about one minute inside before one of their number opened the door to summon the next man. The Black Bat's heart was pounding. There was an idea growing within his brain that all this was being done because the leader suspected a spy might be in their midst. Someone might have noticed that the Bat hadn't left Downing's house. This fact was further confirmed when two of the garage mechanics came into the large room and stood near the door with drawn weapons.

ONLY one man was in front of the Black Bat now and there seemed to be no escape. He had to enter that room and face the consequences.

But how had the leader learned of a spy?

How had word come to him and decided him on this course of action?

"Okay," one of the killers summoned the Black Bat. "Come on in, pal."

The Black Bat entered a much smaller room. The hunchbacked leader sat behind a desk. An automatic lay on top of it and his hand was within easy reach of the weapon. Two other men stood behind him, on either side.

They held guns and eyed the Black Bat narrowly. A third man was directly behind him. The leader began to speak.

"I have received information that the Black Bat is among us, disguised as one of our number. I know all the men in the gang. I'm the only person who does. You'll remove your hat and scarf. When I am sure you're no spy, I'll outline our next move."

The Black Bat's hand moved up to obey, but hesitated. He turned his head and looked at the man behind him, stared at the two guards beside the leader.

"With three mugs watchin' me?" he asked. "I figured nobody except you was to know what we looked like."

"The men will turn around and I'll be the only person to see you," the leader said. "Now, let's see your face."

The three guards obediently turned their backs on the Black Bat. He raised one hand toward his face, whipped off the scarf and the hat with one gesture and his other hand streaked for a gun.

The leader let out a yelp of astonishment, made a grab for the weapon on his desk and the Black Bat's gun sang a deadly song. A bullet slammed into the leader's shoulder, sending him squirming out of his chair. The guards spun around and faced a pair of guns.

"Drop your weapons," the Bat warned, "or I'll drop you. Line up against the wall. You—" he indicated a man of about his own build—"Pick up the disguise I just dropped. Put it on and walk ont of here. Hurry!"

The man gulped and obeyed, hardly realizing the significance of the Black Bat's commands. He went to the door which led into the garage proper, opened it and darted out. Instantly, three men pounced upon him. As the Black Bat had hoped, that shot was heard and the guards outside were warned to expect trouble in the form of a quick getaway. The hunchbacked killers were nowhere in sight, probably escorted to some other room.

The three guards and their victim were a tangle of arms and legs on the floor. The Black Bat suddenly sprinted through the door, across the cement floor and headed straight for the stolen car in which he had ridden in on his way to the garage. As he opened the door, the guards realized their mistake. Guns opened fire. The hunchbacked leader staggered out of his private quarters and howled orders.

The Black Bat slid behind the wheel. There was no time to start the motor, but the car was headed straight for the ramp. He released the brake and it began moving. Bullets spattered against the machine, but its windows were shatter-proofed against revolver and automatic slugs.

Then, one of the thugs raised a submachine gun and sighted it. The Black Bat rolled down the window and fired twice. The man with the rifle curled up and dropped the weapon.

Another man scooped it up, but he was too late. When he fired, his slugs only pounded into the rear of the sedan.

THE Black Bat gripped the wheel with both hands now. If he tried to brake the machine in order to negotiate the sharp curves at a slower and safer rate of speed, he'd let himself wide open to the guns of men who must be planted somewhere below. The sedan was heavy and gained speed with every turn of its wheels.

Tires screeched as the Black Bat brought the machine around and pointed its nose into the next section of the ramp. His arms ached from holding the car in line. Two more stories to negotiate and then the last and most dangerous part of his escape would loom up. By now, word would surely have been flashed below and the garage doors closed.

He made the last turn, crumpling a fender badly as he did so. Then he shot out of the mouth of the ramp, across the ground floor and straight toward the big doors. There were armed men waiting for him and they opened fire, making a curtain of lead through which he had to drive.

The windshield cobwebbed until he could hardly see out of it. Then the doors grew larger and larger. The sedan was rolling at a very fast clip and it hit the doors with all its weight and speed. They crashed and the car plunged its way through.

Instantly, the Black Bat's fingers found the ignition key, turned it and shoved the gear into second. The motor caught and the sedan pulled away with a roar of power.

But the Black Bat wasn't safe yet. Three cars full of crooks darted out after him. They had to open the garage doors first however, and the minute's delay gave the Black Bat an edge which he needed.

Sirens were screeching all around him. He was far more worried about encountering the police

than shooting it out with the crooks. Blasting at those killers would be self-defense, but no matter what happened; he couldn't risk the life of a single officer.

A radio car swung around the corner. The Black Bat yanked the wheel of his sedan, careened crazily and avoided a head-on collision with the police car by inches. Behind him streaked the three cars loaded with crooks. The first two got by the radio car, but the last one had a driver of less skill than the others. He tried to avoid the radio car and lost control of his own machine. It climbed the curb, struck the side of a building and before the four men it contained could get out, the radio patrolmen had them covered.

The Black Bat was heading for the suburbs. He flashed along a sidestreet, turned sharply into an avenue and pushed his foot down level with the floorboards. There was a steep hill to negotiate. Halfway up, he lost speed, but so did the pursuing cars. The Black Bat rounded the top of the grade and an even steeper hill loomed up.

Then he opened the door beside him. He clambered out on the running board, made sure the cars loaded with the hunchback killers were still out of sight and then he gave the wheel a might tug. The car rocked wildly headed straight for the soft shoulder and, at that instant, the Black Bat jumped off. He landed lightly, rolled over a couple of times and then darted for the cover of underbrush.

He saw the two cars come racing down the steep hill. Brakes squealed when the drivers spotted the stalled car, but they were traveling too fast to make a quick stop. There they turned around and came back as fast as possible.

The two cars were parked about twenty feet from where the Black Bat lay hidden. Everyone in them jumped out to rush across the highway and into the darkness of the marshy land beside the road. All were eager to be the first to drag out what was left of the Black Bat and unmask him. They played right into the Black Bat's hands.

There was a daring plan in his mind. He moved quietly toward the two cars. He took the keys from the ignition switch of one and hurled them far into the night. Then to make doubly sure he wouldn't be pursued again, he raised the hood and dismantled the distributor by wrenching wires loose. Next he stealthily crept toward the second car, opened the door very quietly and got behind the wheel.

He stepped on the starter, put the car into second and turned around in the middle of the hill. He gave her the gun and the sedan roared away. On the seat, he found one of the black hats and a scarf.

The men who had pursued him were not the hunchbacks. Apparently, they were reserved for the more important business of robbery and murder. Ordinary riff-raff among the gangworld was recruited for the necessary strong arm work.

The only hunchback who had accompanied the chase was the squat leader. The Black Bat knew now that this man was nothing more than a lieutenant. working under the orders of some mysterious higher-up. He had removed his hat and scarf so he'd be less conspicuous.

At the base of the hill, the Black Bat turned east and headed straight back to town. He still had the floppy brimmed hat and the black scarf affected by the hunchbacks and the false deformation of the hunch was still in place on his own spine.

CHAPTER XVI
A Secret from Bahawal

HE reached the same garage which had so nearly proven a death trap. Now came the most difficult part of his plan. He was depending on the fact that the real hunchbacked leader was too far away from a phone or a ride back to town to make contact with his men.

The Black Bat had chosen the place to wreck his car very carefully.

He drove into the garage. Half a dozen mechanics swarmed around the car. The Black Bat didn't get out. He couldn't risk that because the real leader of the mob was shorter and stockier than the Black Bat's tall, lean frame.

"Did you nail him, boss?" one of the men asked eagerly.

"He escaped into the woods," the Black Bat gave a fairly good imitation of the leader's voice. "I left the others to search for him. Summon the men here at once. You're sure no police are nearby?"

The mechanic laughed.

"Naw! We told 'em it was a gang fight. They think this garage is on the up-and-up. I'll have the boys down here pronto, boss."

The hunchbacked killers assembled on the ground floor. They were out of sight of the street and if anyone should happen to drive in unexpectedly, two vast trucks would conceal the men.

"You all have your instructions," the Black Bat said. still imitating the leader's voice as best he could. The men were on edge and excited. They noticed no change in the tone. "Some of you may not have received the new orders because the appearance of the Black Bat broke up our meeting. Those of you who do know them will acquaint the others with all the information neces-

sary. We strike at once. There isn't a moment to lose. Get going!"

The men split into groups and filled three cars. These rolled out of the garage about three minutes apart but the Black Bat, in the last car, followed close on the heels of the one before him.

He hadn't the vaguest notion as to where they were headed. He did notice that the three cars took different routes to avoid attracting any attention, but he hung onto the tail of the one he had chosen to lead him. They proceeded downtown.

Suddenly, the car he followed slowed. Then the car turned into a driveway between two towering buildings. The Black Bat rolled in right behind it. The other two cars were there waiting. Four of the hunchback killers had already been dispersed to places of vantage from which they could keep a sharp watch.

"Get it over with," the Black Bat snapped at the men who approached him. "I won't be able to help you much. Wrenched my ankle chasing that damned Black Bat. Hurry!"

They nodded and he saw them quietly scale a fence. His eyes scanned the building on the other side of it and his uncanny sight enabled him to read the rather faded letters on a sign fastened high up above the fear entrance.

"Security Bank," he whistled softly. "It remains open until midnight. Dr. Norden had plenty of time to reach it. Now I know what that leader meant when he said he knew where the last article was. Norden put something in that bank and these men are going after it."

THE BLACK BAT blinked the parking lights on his car. One of the guards came running over to him.

"Follow the others," the Black Bat ordered. "Tell them not to forget that this job must be done quietly, and there is to be no killing. We don't want the cops on our heels now, when everything is practically finished. Beat it!"

The weird-looking figure with its hunched spine sped away. Minutes passed and the Black Bat realized that with the passing of time his danger grew by leaps and bounds. The real leader was bound to contact the garage as soon as he could. Once he was told that an imposter had led his men out on this job, he'd rush straight down to the bank.

Then the vanguard of the hunchbacked crooks came swarming over the fence. One of them rushed straight up to where the Black Bat sat in his car.

"A pipe, boss," he gloated. "We had the joint cased right. We just busted in without setting off any alarms. conked the watchman on the head and blasted open the safe deposit box. A sweet job if I say so!"

"Well, did you get what you went after?" the Black Bat snapped. "Hand it over. I haven't got all night. The sooner I place this article in the proper hands, the faster we collect our dough."

The hunchback shoved his hand into his pocket, brought out a cotton-wrapped object and placed it in the Black Bat's proffered hand.

"There she is. boss. When do we meet for the big cut? Boy, we sure pulled off these jobs neat. Not even the Black Bat stopped us."

The Black Bat didn't examine the cotton-wrapped object. He merely shoved it into his pocket, shifted into reverse and began backing up preparatory to negotiating the driveway. The thugs watched him and the Black Bat had an idea they were somewhat suspicious of his actions.

He had to back far around. Once, he thought he felt the rear door of the car open and close, but he glanced over his shoulder and saw nothing. He decided it was just a case of nerves.

One of the hunchbacks waved both hands to bring the Black Bat's car to a stop. He looked at the Black Bat with a queer light gleaming in his eyes.

"You sure everything is okay, boss? There ain't been no slip-ups?"

The Black Bat shook his head, extended his hand and the thug. in a surprised manner, shook hands with him.

"Everything is perfect," the Black Bat said. "You'll hear from me by the usual channels."

He started the car slowly. Once he hit the street, he'll be safe. Until then he must not give away the trick by undue haste. Then he heard a shout of rage.

"That's the Black Bat," one of the men yelled. "It's the Bat! Get him!"

He tramped hard on the accelerator, turned into the street and gave her the gun. By the time the thugs reached their own cars and got under way, the Black Bat had completely vanished.

"Now how in the world did they know it was the Black Bat?" he asked himself with a puzzled frown. "The real leader didn't show up, not even a messenger."

BUT he was safe now and for once the victor over this murder mob. When he was well out of town, he pulled off the road, stopped and brought out the cotton-wrapped object. He exposed the largest diamond he'd ever seen. It sparkled like a living thing in his hand.

The Black Bat gave a sharp ejaculation of surprise. He'd expected something like this, but not a diamond so large. He doubted if it could be surpassed by more than two or three gems in the world.

He studied the design of the gem again and counted the sharp points raised in the cutting. There were seven. That number was significant in the ideology of the gods of distant India. *Siva* was supposed to have seven heads. It was very possible that this gem had been cut in this peculiar fashion to honor this goddess of death and destruction in whom every believer paid homage.

The Black Bat relaxed against the cushions of the car, trying to think back and associate this gigantic gem with other facts. Then he stiffened and broke out in a cold sweat. The point of a knife was resting firmly against his neck.

"You will not move," an accented voice warned. "Simply reach back and hand me the diamond. You are an exceedingly clever man and I admit that only sheer good fortune guided me to that bank.

"I knew the estimable Dr. Norden had placed the gem in a safe deposit vault there and I realized the thieves would attempt to gain possession of it as quickly as possible. I was hidden beneath, a platform and when you backed close by it, I slipped into the car most quietly."

The Black Bat didn't make the mistake of reaching for his guns. That knife was too firm. When he spoke, his voice was quite calm.

"It seems that you win. You are not one of that murder mob because if you were, the knife would have slit my throat minutes ago. I am very curious. If I give you my word that I shall not resort to violence, will you come around into the front seat? I like to see people with whom I do business."

The man in the tonneau hesitated a moment and then he laughed softly.

"I have heard that you keep your word so we shall declare an armistice, eh? But do not misjudge me. I hold a gun. with the hammer cocked and my finger on the trigger quite firmly. I suggest you place your hands on the wheel and keep them there."

A short. dark-featured little man got into the front seat. His face was the color of bronze and he displayed a row of perfectly white teeth in a wide grin. Then he held out his hand for the diamond. The Black Bat sighed deeply and dropped the gem into the mystery man's palm.

"I owe you an apology," his visitor smiled again. "You see, I was the one who dragged you out of that gas-filled house. You were quite unconscious and I meant to have a look at your features. I am sorry for that. I would never have forgiven myself."

"Nor would I have forgiven you, Rajah," the Black Bat inclined his head.

THE little man gasped. "Then you—know?"

"I know. You are the Rajah of Bahawal. This diamond belongs to you. I am returning it willingly and you have my promise that the rest of the gems will be in your hands as quickly as I can get them. Now I'd be interested in learning the whole story!"

The Rajah stuffed his gun into his pocket and his smile was wider than ever.

"Even in far-off Bahawal I had heard of the Black Bat and envied the life he led. Yet the stones are mine. There are seven of them. Two diamonds, two of the largest black pearls ever brought up, two emeralds and a ruby. Singly they are worth a quarter of a million apiece, amounting to a million and a half in all. Together, properly assembled into the garland of *Siva*, they are worth three times that figure.

"My little country has been wavering on the brink of rebellion for months. Spies brought me news that violence was ripe. I am one of the wealthiest men in the world, but I am a strange ruler, too. It is my idea that much of my wealth belongs to the State of Bahawal. All except this necklace which was purchased with my personal income.

"To let it get into the hands of revolutionists would have broken my heart. Therefore I separated the gems and concealed them in apparently worthless bric-a-brac. These articles I mailed to friends in the United States!"

The Black Bat turned slightly and faced the Rajah.

"You sent them to Grant Hollis, Robert Kilpatrick, Elmer White, Ed Johnson, Geoffrey Thomas, Dr. Hugo Norden and Alex Pierce. These men were all friends of yours, and had been your guests on hunting expeditions in India. You trusted them, but in order not to place their lives in jeopardy, you concealed the gems so that they wouldn't know the real worth of the articles you sent."

"Exactly," the Rajah nodded. "I wrote each man a letter indicating that I would consider it a favor if those worthless little objects were safely held for me until I called for them in person.

"When I reached the United States, the hunchbacked killers were already in action and it was too late for me to rescue any of the gems. I tried to contact some of the men but they weren't in. Dr. Norden was the only one left who hadn't been robbed, so I was on the lookout for this raid. I could not go to the police because of the publicity. I fled my land, and the usurper of my throne has sent spies to kill me. I could do nothing to help."

For a full minute, the Black Bat said nothing. His mind worked furiously and cleared up several important points.

"Hollis and Kilpatrick were murdered," he said slowly. "None of the others suffered that fate. I've wondered why and now I know. Hollis and Kilpatrick must have accidentally discovered that those objects contained the gems. Somehow the man behind this murder and robbery knew it.

"He had to kill them or the whole game would have been given away. His men robbed the others and the theft of those pieces of bric-a-brac looked merely accidental—as if the thieves hoped they'd bring some revenue. Elmer White guessed what was up when I mentioned the 'garland!' He was murdered before he could talk. Rajah, have you the least idea as to who might have hired those killers?"

"None," the Rajah declared with a groan. "I have tried very hard to figure it out. There is only Mr. Johnson, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Pierce and Dr. Norden left. Thomas never even saw the article I sent him for he has been away for weeks."

"Did you ever hear of an attorney named Fenner, or of Kilpatrick's cousin, James Downing?"

"I have never heard the names before," the Rajah answered promptly. "It may interest you to know that I managed to take considerable money with me. I am willing to offer half a million dollars reward for the return of all the gems."

"Sorry," the Black Bat said slowly. "I don't work for a reward. Breaking up this mob, convicting those behind them, and exacting judgment for the murders they have committed is reward enough for me. The diamond is quite safe with you, Rajah. No one realizes you are in this country. My advice is to keep under cover. Where can I contact you?"

"At the Netherlands Hotel. Under the name of Raj Hanan. If I can be of any help...."

"Drive this car back to town. I'll tell you where to drop me. Then get rid of the car as quickly as possible. Do nothing else until you hear from me."

CHAPTER XVII
Educated Fingers

NOT long after the Rajah dropped him off, the Black Bat was in the privacy of his laboratory. Silk, Butch and Carol listened to his revelations with great interest.

"So six of the gems are in the hands of whoever planned this series of crimes and murders. Without the seventh stone, our mysterious bandit cannot cash in on the full value of the garland. He will go to all ends to get this stone back.

"While he interests himself in this manner, we'll have to concentrate on getting from him, the six other gems. I have theories and ideas, yet none are concrete. I shall need your help from now on and it's going to be a risky business."

"Then you know who is behind it all?" Carol asked tensely.

"No, my dear," Tony Quinn answered. "I have only suspicions and they point in several directions. Our list of suspects includes Edward Johnson and Dr. Norden, and Alex Pierce, all of whom received stones. Then there is Attorney Jay Fenner, a man I wouldn't trust with a one-dollar Confederate piece of currency. He knows crooks and could assemble a dangerous mob, exactly the type of which the hunchbacked killers are composed.

"Lastly, we have Jim Downing. "He was in an undue hurry to move into his cousin's home. There is a possibility that he knew about a certain secret room in that house which the hunchbacks used as a hiding place to get clear of the police. Downing vanished rather mysteriously when the shooting began."

Carol's hand rested lightly on Tony Quinn's arm. "This Rajah, Tony. You are quite certain he couldn't have hired these men to get his gems back? Perhaps he discovered that Hollis and Kilpatrick had uncovered the real worth of the articles he sent to them. Perhaps they refused to give them up, and he killed them for it."

Tony Quinn pressed both hands against his temples.

"Almost anything is possible. The Rajah is smooth, all right. But talking will get us nowhere. Silk, I want you to go to the Netherlands Hotel and watch the Rajah. Better fix yourself up in that disguise which makes you look like a polished banker. Try to get the suite next to the Rajah. He's registered under the name of Raj Hanan. Keep your eye on him."

"Do I get something to do?" Butch queried petulantly.

"You watch Attorney Fenner. Never let him out of your sight. Carol. Alex Pierce is your assignment. Watch his house. Take your car and park nearby. We'll be out of contact with one another temporarily because I'll be busy, too, later on. We have just a short time before morning. Report back here at six o'clock. Now, on your way."

Silk went immediately to his room, dusted off an expensive suit of clothes which had paid him dividends in those days when he lived by his wits.

When he finished and drew on his clothes, he looked exactly like a typical banker. Pompous, stern and gray-haired. A white-edged vest and rib-boned glasses added to the picture. He drew on a black Homburg, surveyed himself in the mirror and nodded in satisfaction.

THEN he slipped out of the house, walked to the next corner and took a cab. He was driven to a section where stores remained open all night. There he purchased two used suitcases and some second-hand clothing. He filled the suitcases and noted with satisfaction that they were plastered with labels of foreign countries.

He registered under an assumed name, hemmed and hawed at the desk until he had a chance to learn the number of the Rajah's suite and then began making a nuisance of himself by rejecting the quarters offered to him until finally he was deposited in the suite next to the Rajah.

Silk lost no time in getting into action. He was an old hand at this sort of thing. He opened the window and slipped out on the ten-inch ledge which circled the building far above the ground.

Slowly, he moved over toward the windows of the Rajah's suite. He reached the window, secured a grip on the frame and took a quick look inside.

The Rajah was just replacing the phone in its cradle and there was a grimace of quandary on his dark face. He seemed to be waiting for someone. Silk had never seen Jim Downing, but he had a good description of him and the man who finally entered the room was certainly the strange-acting cousin and heir of Robert Kilpatrick.

Downing accepted a chair and began talking. Silk gave the lower sash a gentle push upward and opened the window half an inch. He could hear Downing speak now.

"... and therefore I feel that I should be rewarded for my work. You can readily realize that I've risked my life to get this gem back for you."

"Indeed I can," the Rajah agreed. "Of course, you have the stone with you. After I am very certain there can be no mistake, I shall be quite willing to talk business."

Downing smiled, reached into his pocket and produced a small leather pouch. He opened it and spilled a flashing stone into the palm of his hand. The Rajah reached for it. Instantly, Downing pulled the stone away. He whipped a gun out of his pocket.

"Now you can handle the stone," he smiled coldly. "Not that I don't trust you, Your Excellency, but I can't quite forget the danger I put around myself to get this gem. Have a look, satisfy yourself it's genuine and then—talk business."

The Rajah shrugged, paid no attention to the gun and held the diamond in the light. He asked if he might use a jeweler's glass on it and Downing acquiesced.

The Rajah had a glass in his pocket. Downing's finger tightened on the trigger of his gun as the Rajah reached for it. Then he relaxed and the potentate from far away India studied the gem intently. He handed it back with a slight bow.

"Congratulations. This is the real stone. I am willing to pay you fifty thousand dollars for its return. I shall not even ask your identity!"

"It's a deal," Downing answered quickly. "Hand me the dough and you get the rock."

The Rajah spread his hands in an eloquent gesture.

"But it is three o'clock in the morning and you cannot expect me to carry such a sum on my person. Tomorrow, at nine-thirty I shall have it. You may meet me here."

SILK didn't wait to hear any more. When Downing arrived at the elevators, he found an important looking man also standing waiting there. Downing nodded affably for he was in high humor. They rode down together, walked across the lobby and Downing stepped into one section of the revolving doors. Unexpectedly, he discovered he had company. The wealthy, portly looking man was crammed into the small space also.

"I'm terribly sorry," this man said. "Big deal on in the morning. Couldn't sleep. Can't even think, I guess. That's why I didn't look at what I was doing. Money, my boy, can divert the human mind more than alcohol."

Half a minute later, Silk was in a taxi. He held a five-dollar bill under the driver's nose.

"I've got to make a train. Five minutes is all the time I have. This is yours if you reach the station."

In the darkness of the tonneau Silk was grinning. In the palm of one hand lay the shimmering diamond which had been in Jim Downing's pocket only a few minutes before. Silk entered the railroad station by one door, emerged through another and changed cabs twice again before he reached the vicinity of Tony Quinn's home. He found Tony Quinn in his role of a blind man, sitting in his usual chair before the fireplace.

Silk drew himself up, lifted Quinn's hand and deposited the stone in his palm.

"Easy work, sir. A positive cinch. Jim Downing probably hasn't missed this stone—yet. How did I land it? With my educated fingers, sir."

"Jim Downing?" Quinn asked with a frown. "Did he have this stone?"

"Offered to turn it over to the Rajah for fifty thousand dollars, sir. Looks as if the case has been broken wide open. Downing knows the stones may become very hot before he can get rid of them so he's posing as a private investigator and 'recovering' the gems one by one and selling them back to the Rajah."

Tony Quinn shifted the diamond from one hand to the other.

"It's real because the Rajah would have detected a phony in half a minute. This throws my case off

balance, Silk. It blows the whole works into little pieces. Downing profited by his cousin's death and he is unquestionably a rat, but—he came into a considerable fortune from Kilpatrick's estate. His motivation isn't strong enough."

Silk began counting on his fingers.

"Seven stones, sir, at fifty thousand dollars each runs into a considerable fortune. Downing may have inherited wealth, but you can't tell me he'd turn his nose up at a sum like that. He's just profiting two ways—by killing his cousin to inherit, and getting these stones to sell back to the Rajah. What else can it be?"

Quinn's fingers closed around the stone and he looked steadily into space. Silk was venturing a rather concrete case. Of all the suspects, Downing was the most typical man whose characteristics would run to robbery and violence if the reward was large enough.

Then the phone rang, startling both men. Silk answered it and summoned Quinn.

"It's Butch and he sounds very excited, sir."

CHAPTER XVIII
McGrath Gets a Present

MORE than impatient at the none-too-exciting assignment wbich the Black Bat gave him, Butch made his way to Attorney Fenner's house. His disgust was supreme when he discovered the place shrouded in darkness. But he secured a dark spot in which to conceal himself and took up the vigil.

He waited only a matter of an hour before things began to happen. A car pulled up with squealing brakes and a young man jumped out, raced up the path to Fenner's porch and pressed the doorbell incessantly. Lights were turned on and, from his hiding place, Butch saw Fenner open the door. The light from the hallway illuminated the caller and Butch's lower jaw stuck out aggressively. The visitor could be none other than Jim Downing.

He was excited and worried. He kept looking over his shoulder as he stepped into the house; Fenner closed the door and Butch followed the movements of the two men by watching the drawn window shades.

They went immediately to a room on the side of the house facing Butch. He began crawling forward very carefully. He was crouched beneath the window when he gave a soft gasp and beat a hasty retreat.

For a bare fraction of a second, he had caught a glimpse of an eerie form flitting through the darkness. The hunchbacked killers had arrived!

Butch's big hands curled into mighty fists. This was rapidly becoming a situation to his liking. Once, one of the hunchbacks passed within ten feet of him, but Butch didn't stir. He wanted to find out what these men sought here. Was it Downing or Fenner? Were they on the prowl, or was this house their headquarters?

Butch couldn't figure it out, but he decided he'd better do something about it. His memory flashed back to the hours during which these men had held him prisoner.

Apparently, the hunchbacked men weren't intent on raiding the house yet. They seemed to have vanished completely. Then Butch spotted one of them slipping toward the same window under which he had crouched. The figure raised his head slightly, took a quick look inside and then returned to the darkness where his friends were concealed.

Butch began wriggling forward, his goal a certain lilac bush close by the path from Fenner's estate. He reached it and lay prone, waiting and hoping. Finally, Fenner opened the door of his house and Jim Downing emerged. He muttered a good night and went down the steps.

Downing walked rapidly toward the street. Then, suddenly, two of the hunchbacked men rose up out of the darkness and fell into step with him. Downing made no sound and Butch couldn't see the expression on his face. By his silence, Butch guessed that Downing hadn't been particularly surprised.

There were two cars parked at the curb. Downing climbed into one of them. Four other hunchbacked men arose from the gloom and hurried toward the cars. One lagged behind a bit. He was in plain sight one moment and the next he had vanished as completely as if the night had swallowed him up.

THE others missed him, started back to search, but a sharp command from one of the cars called it off.

"Let him get away himself," someone growled. "The orders were to stay near the exit."

Both cars drove off. Butch arose carefully. So did another figure, but not of its own will. Butch had a stranglehold on the man's neck, preventing any possibility of an outcry.

Butch held his man by the throat, a foot off the ground, and regarded him thoughtfully. It was one of the hunchbacked killers:

"Remember me. pal?" Butch asked with a wide grin. "Now listen, I'm puttin' you down, but if you make one peep, I'll push your nose outa the back of your neck."

Butch set his prisoner down, but the man's legs

had turned to rubber and he wilted like a tired balloon. A hoarse, low cry came from his throat and his eyes glazed. Butch snorted in contempt, hoisted the man to one shoulder and headed away from the house.

When he reached the street, he stopped to consider things. He couldn't very well walk along with an unconscious hunchback draped over one shoulder. Butch's methods were primitive, but highly effective. He merely picked the man up, held him at arm's length and drove a hard right to the chin.

"That'll hold you for a little while," he snickered.

Butch pulled his clothes into some semblance of order, stepped out on the sidewalk and strolled nonchalantly away. He needed a telephone and he recalled that a drugstore about three blocks north had been open when he passed it an hour before. It was still open. He made sure he was unobserved, stepped into the phone booth and called Tony Quinn's home.

"Yeah," he chortled. "Sure it's one of them boobs. How could I be wrong? He's got a hump on his back and I just hung another hump on his chin. What'll I do with him?"

"Hold him right there. I'll be over," Quinn promised. "Be careful that Fenner doesn't spot you and watch out for the rest of the mob."

Butch was sitting on the stomach of his prisoner when the almost invisible form of the Black Bat suddenly appeared.

"Nice work," the Black Bat said. "I need this man. He's unconscious yet, eh? If things work out, you'll have those knuckles of yours in splints before morning. Silk is in a car at the next corner. Join him and wait for orders."

As Butch slipped away, the Black Bat knelt beside the prisoner and quickly peeled off his outer clothing. He exposed the fake hump attached to his spine—and something else that made the Bat's lips come together in a tight line. He shook the man hard and awakened him. The killer opened his eyes, oriented his lenses and then caught a glimpse of the Black Bat's hooded head and his ribbed cape. He gave a little sigh and fainted.

"Odd," the Black Bat thought, "how tough these babies can be when they outnumber their victims and hold guns. When the tables are turned, they're like jelly. Fools with ambitions to become criminals would profit by seeing this half-minute egg right now!"

HE SET to work bringing the man back to consciousness, jealous of every minute that slipped by. Things were beginning to break. Certain features of the case, previously jumbled in the Black Bat's mind, were starkly clear now. He had work to do and the Black Bat only flew by night.

The prisoner awoke again, shuddered until his teeth chattered and talked. He talked a blue streak between pleading for his life and cajoling the Black Bat with a string of lies about his being forced into the dirty business.

"Then you don't know who is behind the crimes," the Black Bat said slowly. "I'm sure you don't or you'd have sung his name by now. The only contact with this higher-up is through Monk Brady, the short man who leads you on these raids. You and your hoodlum pals stole six gems. Where are they?"

"I don't know. Honest, I don't. Monk took 'em, see? He turned 'em over to the big-shot. We was to get our cut tonight but somethin' happened. We got orders to come down here and meet this Jim Downing chump."

"To meet him or take him prisoner?" the Bat queried.

"I don't know. Look, me, I'm nothin' but a little guy. They don't tell me things."

"Where are they taking Downing?" the Black Bat asked.

"Monk has got a hideaway in the cellar of a warehouse down by the river. It's at the end of Elizabeth Street. That's the only place we got left. You busted up the rest of 'em."

"All right." the Black Bat said. "Get up and talk ahead of me. This is a gun drilling into your

McGRATH

back and I wouldn't mind in the least saving the state some money by exterminating you."

LIEUTENANT McGRATH was living in a dream world wherein he had the Black Bat at bay and was ready to unmask him. Then the buzzing of his front doorbell brought him back to reality. He jumped out of. bed, donned a robe and seized his service pistol. He raced down the stairs, heard a car start away and approached the door warily. He peered through the curtains. There was a man standing on his front porch. A man dressed all in black with a prominent hump on his shoulders.

McGrath yanked the door open, stepped out onto the porch with his gun extended. His face was hard and uncompromising.

"If this is a trap, you'll get it before your pals start shooting," he warned. "Lift 'em!"

The figure swayed slightly forward, seemed to lose its balance and came headlong toward McGrath. He jumped back with a hoarse shout of alarm and very nearly emptied his gun into the hunchback's chest. The only thing that prevented this action was a glimpse of something white pinned to the man's coat.

McGrath was still wary as he turned the man over. He noticed the swollen jaw, the half-glazed eyes. The hunchback had been rapped on the chin and when he was on the point of recovering his wits, someone had stood him on the front porch. McGrath didn't need a description of the person responsible for all this.

Plastered between the eyes of the half-conscious crook was a Black Bat sticker!

McGrath pulled the note off the coat and read it while his face flushed scarlet.

The note said:

> You are slipping, McGrath. I have to go out and nail your killers for you. This will introduce one Billy the Barber. He told me, quite confidentially, that be derived his name because he was employed to shave the throats of certain gentlemen very, very close. His knowledge of the hunchbacked killers' activities are on the same high plane as your own. He knows nothing.

CHAPTER XIX
The Finger of Suspicion

KEEPING Silk at the wheel as chauffeur. Butch and the Black Bat roared away from McGrath's home.

Butch was doubled up with laughter.

"Some day," he opined, "McGrath is gonna get so mad. be's just gonna walk in the house, boss, and blast away to prove that when Tony Quinn is rubbed out, the Black Bat don't show no more!"

"Are we on the way home, sir?" Silk queried from the front of the car.

"Not quite yet. Drive to Elizabeth Street and park three-quarters of the way down it. Butch, polish up your knuckles. I'm not exactly certain what we'll find at our destination, but I rather think one of the things will be trouble."

"Boy!"—Butch straightened up quickly—"Oh boy!"

Silk maneuvered the car into a driveway between two abandoned buildings. They all got out and listened to quiet instructions from the Black Bat. Butch and Silk slipped away in the darkness. The Black Bat gave them a couple of minutes and then he made his own stealthy way toward the old warehouse the captured hunchback mobster had described.

Inside, deep within the cellar, there was activity, however, of a somewhat gruesome nature. Jim Downing occupied a chair, not because he particularly wanted to be sitting there, but coils of wire fastened him. He was covered with sweat and the veins in his forehead stood out starkly blue. Four of the hunchbacks were gathered around him and in the center of the room, striding up and down was Attorney Jay Fenner.

He looked more like a shyster now than ever before. His collar was opened at the throat. A cigarette dangled from his lips. The usual immaculateness of his clothing was gone.

He looked like a man considerably harassed. He stopped in front of Downing and faced him squarely.

"Listen, you double-crossing little fool, what happened to that diamond? You had it, because that's why you went to call on the Rajah. The sum of money you were bound to demand must have been too large to consummate the transaction at that hour of the morning. Therefore, you had it when you left. Where did you hide it?"

"Somebody picked my pocket," Downing wailed. "I told you that ten times already. Can't you see I'm speaking the truth? And I thought you were my friend, that I could trust you!"

"Friend?" Fenner scowled. "In this business, with the stakes running into the millions, there's no such thing as friendship. It'a every man for himself. If I don't make you tell where that stone is hidden, you won't be the only man to die. They'll kill me, too."

DOWNING made a wry face. "Don't tell me that, Fenner. I went to your house for advice. You left me long enough to make a phone call, and then, when I left, these—these devils took me."

Downing looked askance at the hunchbacked, partially masked men. He shivered and quickly averted his gaze, There was murder written in their eyes.

Fenner threw up both hands.

"One more chance, Downing. Only one more. Without that rock the rest of the stuff is worth little in comparison to its value when assembled. I can promise you dying won't be easy. These men will lose a great deal of money by your reluctance to talk. They won't like it and they're very apt to take it out of your hide. Now for the last time—where did you hide that diamond?"

"Somebody picked my pocket," Downing said wearily. "I can't tell you anything else because that's the truth. And even if it weren't, you'd never dare to let me go because I know now that you're the man behind this gang. If I lived, you'd go to the chair. I've been a fool and I admit it, but I'm a little smarter now by experience!"

Fenner motioned to the hunchbacked men.

"You see? I can't make him talk, not even when my own life hangs in the balance. Kill him!"

Downing grew deathly pale and he chewed on his lip for a moment. Then words burst from him.

"Kill me! Yes, kill me! So I'll never tell anyone how you looted my cousin's estate. He trusted you. So did I, until I checked the books. You tried to change tbem around, but you were too late.

"You've been a crook all your life, Fenner. You knew about that secret room in the house. My cousin used to keep his books there and he did sculpting as a hobby there. You saw me clearing it out. You told those men to hide there while the police searched the house. You're the leader of these men and I'Il die anyway."

Fenner's face grew crimson with rage. He advanced on Downing with his fists clenched. Then he gave a derisive snarl and waved his hand to the four hunchbacks.

They didn't need any other command. One of them secured a rope, threw it toward the ceiling and looped it around one of the supporting beams. Another man fashioned a noose out of one end. Downing's wire bonds were removed and he was led into the middle of the floor.

Two of the killers tripped him and he fell with a terrific jar. They pounced on him, looped the rope around his ankles and pulled him two feet off the floor. He hung there, head down and the blood turned his pallid face to a violent red.

Fenner looked at him coldly.

"You'll live a little while like that, but the longer you keep silent, the worse it will be. Better talk, Downing. Better tell us where you hid that diamond. Your story of having your pockets picked is a little too thin for me."

The hunchbacks separated, each one taking up a position at the various sides of the cellar. One stood near the door, enjoying this spectacle of a tortured man's writhings. Everyone knew he was there. Everyone saw him—and then they didn't. The hunchback had completely vanished.

Fenner's eyes grew hard with fear.

"See what happened to him," he cried. "He wasn't supposed to leave the room."

Two of the men rushed out. Five minutes went by and neither of them returned. Fenner became paler than Downing had been. He turned on his heel and stalked across the room. There was a door on the opposite side and he vanished through it.

He kicked aside a small packing case and revealed a telephone of the type used to tap wires with. He dialed a number. When he finished talking, he started back into the other room. He took two or three steps beyond the door and stopped in his tracks.

The four hunchbacked men were all there now. They sat in a row against the further wall, their heads lolling limply against their shoulders and the scarfs torn away from their faces. On the forehead of each one was the brand of the Black Bat!

Fenner realized something else was wrong. The form of Downing, which had hung head down, was gone. Only the severed rope swung gently. He gave vent to a bellow of mixed anguish and despair, looked around wildly and finally his eyes came back to the vicinity of the door.

A man stood there—a man clad in black with a hood over his head and from his shoulders were draped wings like those of a bat. There was a gun in his fist.

"Did you finish your call for help, Mr. Fenner?" the Black Bat asked pleasantly. "I'm hoping that certain people will respond. Now just see how high you can stretch your arms and keep them there."

"I—I—you got me wrong," Fenner managed. All the courtroom and office suaveness had vanished.

"Don't talk," the Black Bat said. "I'm not a jury susceptible to your smooth lying. You've played a dirty game and lost. I...."

From deep within the cellar came a hoarse cry of warning.

"Bat! Look out!"

The Black Bat spun around. Two hunchbacked men were advancing toward him with guns ready in their fists. The Black Bat's weapon spoke first. One of the men slithered to the floor. The other opened fire, but things had happened so fast that his nerves were on edge and he missed. Killers

never missed the Black Bat twice. The second man dropped and didn't move again. The Black Bat turned back. Fenner was gone.

The attorney seized his advantage, bolted into the other room, cut through it and began racing along the cellar toward an exit—any exit so long as it led him away from the Black Bat. He saw an open door ahead of him, saw the night sky through it and increased his speed. He flashed through the door.

A figure moved out to intercept him. Fenner gave a wild yelp and tried to evade the man, but that was impossible. Two strong hands grabbed him, yanked his arms behind his back and pinned them there.

SILK was panting hard. This exertion was usually left to Butch, but he was busy inside rounding up more of those weirdly garbed monsters.

"Walk toward that car," Silk snapped. "Walk fast because I've got things to do and I'd rather lay you out cold anyhow."

Fenner walked faster than he'd ever walked in his life despite the restraining grasp on his arms. He got into the car, started to turn around to sit down and a wrench smashed against his skull. Silk whirled and headed back toward the warehouse.

Then he gasped in horror. There were cars coming down the street, four or five of them, with sirens screaming. The police were arriving in force. Silk reached the doorway.

"The cops are here—four cars full of them."

In a moment, Butch came racing out.

"The Black Bat says we're to scram and take Fenner and Downing with us. He'll hold the cops until we get clear."

Silk hesitated, but orders were orders. Butch opened the cover of an ash box at the rear of the warehouse, reached into its depths and hauled out Downing. He draped the man over his shoulder and sprinted for the car. Silk was behind the wheel, but he didn't start the motor.

The police cars stopped and rifle-armed men jumped out. Silk groaned when he saw that Lieutenant McGrath was in charge of them. Two patrolmen were advancing belligerently toward the car. Silk had a low feeling in his heart that this was the end of the Black Bat and his associates.

Then a series of shots came from within the warehouse. Bullets sang over the heads of the advancing patrolmen. They spun around, heard a mocking laugh and looked up. On the roof of the warehouse stood an unmistakable figure—the Black Bat!

"Into the place," McGrath yelled. "He's alone and we've got him now."

Silk stepped on the starter during the answering burst of fire from the police guns. He eased the car into low and slid away without being seen.

"He risked his own safety to let us get clear," Silk said with a gulp. "If I didn't think he had a chance of getting out, I wouldn't go. But he gave us orders. There's nothing else to do. He let Fenner make the phone call to see who he'd contact but Fenner was too smart. He called the cops instead to come and get the Black Bat."

Butch was looking through the rear window. Fenner groaned and stirred. Without glancing at him, Butch doubled his fist and smacked him on top of the head. Fenner passed out again.

"Chance?" Butch said stonily. "What chance has he got now, with twenty cops and McGrath all around!"

CHAPTER XX
McGrath Hears Voices

VIGILANTLY the Bat watched them get away. Then he rushed across the roof, leaped through the skylight which he had already opened, and landed on the floor inside. He was up in a flash and streaking for the stairway. If he could only reach the first floor, hide himself and wait until the police investigated the upper regions of the big warehouse, he'd have a ghost of a chance.

He did reach the second floor before the police stormed up the stairs. The Black Bat dived into a small anteroom. Unlike the police, he wasn't handicapped by the darkness. His eyes saw that there were stout rafters at the ceiling, like those in the basement.

He gave a running leap and missed. The impact of his weight against the floor brought the police outside to a standstill.

"Don't turn on your flashlights," McGrath warned. "He'll use them for targets."

"But that noise came from over there," someone said in a low voice.

"It came from upstairs," McGrath yelled. "What kind of a dope do you think I am? Up there, all of you. He's probably still on the roof. I'll cover what's left of this floor, but he isn't here."

Pounding of many feet told the Black Bat that McGrath's orders were being obeyed. McGrath broke his own orders however and sprayed the walls with his flash. He sent the ray floorward, grunted and began walking very slowly toward the anteroom in which the Black Bat was hidden. Because of the necessity for haste, the Black Bat hadn't noticed his feet had created a trail on the dusty floor.

McGrath pushed open the door and stepped inside. The Black Bat, in a far corner, could have sent a dozen bullets smashing through McGrath's body, but he would far rather have faced a life term in prison than hurt any officer of the law. His throat was dry. When McGrath turned on that flash, he was done. The end of the trail had come at last. The Black Bat's only consolation lay in the fact that McGrath would be the one to effect the capture. He really deserved the honor.

The Black Bat stepped forward without trying to be quiet.

"I'm over here, Lieutenant," he said calmly. "There's no need to shoot. I'll throw my guns on the floor."

McGrath's head turned and he looked over his shoulder.

"I'm daft," he said aloud. "I could have sworn I heard a voice. This darkness must be getting me—and me with a busted flashlight, too! If the Black Bat is around, he'll only have to slip out of the cellar and swipe a police car. Seems to me I even left the motor running in mine."

"Thanks, Lieutenant," the Black Bat said. "You'll be well repaid. Before dawn I'll put the whole hunchbacked mob right in your lap with the brains behind them ready for a cell. I know why you're doing this. I saved your life back at Downing's house. This is your way of repaying me. I'll not forget it."

BY his actions McGrath seemed to have heard nothing. He still talked in a low voice as if to himself.

"I'd hate to land him at that. He saved my neck not many hours ago and I owe him a break, but after that we're even again. Well, guess I'd better go up and see if they cornered him on the roof. Anyway, we've got six of the hunchbacks downstairs. That's something."

McGrath walked out of the room, headed for the stairs and climbed them slowly. There was a peculiar smile on his face. He wiped it off before he stepped onto the roof.

The Black Bat found his exit cleared of all danger. He reached McGrath's car and rolled away. There wasn't even an alarm. McGrath had deliberately drawn all his men to the opposite aide of the building.

The Black Bat selected the darkest streets possible. He glanced at his watch. In an hour and a half, it would be daylight and he had many things to do. He proceeded straight to the home of Alex Pierce, the jeweler, rolled on by it and saw Carol's car parked nearby. He signaled her, kept on driving until he was two miles away from the vicinity and then he abandoned the police car. He transferred himself to Carol's coupé and sank wearily into the seat beside her.

"You're all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Quite. Rather a few bad moments though, but everything is all right now. What about Pierce?"

"Never stirred out of the house all evening," Carol declared flatly. "I can swear to that. What's happened to Butch and Silk?"

"Having the time of their lives," the Black Bat laughed. "Butch went to town on a few of those disguised hoodlums and was in his glory. He doesn't know it yet, but he isn't through.

"We rounded up six of the killers. There are about eight more of them and I especially want to land this gentle creature who calls himself Monk. He's the brainiest of the lot and therefore the greatest menace to society. Drive home, darling. We'll spend a few minutes there and then hit the road again. That is, I will. You've finished your work on this case."

"Tony," Carol gasped. "You know who is behind all this then? I've been thinking. You know I checked up on the suspicious characters. I'd say it was Attorney Fenner because he had contact with more of those murdered and robbed men than anyone else. He handled some of their legal matters. His reputation indicates that he'd stoop to any level to gain his own ends. It is Fenner, isn't it?"

The Black Bat grinned. "Fenner is in it all right, my dear—in it up to his rotten neck, but he became mixed up in the deal more by accident than anything else. Downing discovered that Fenner had looted the estate of Kilpatrick. He held that over Fenner's head, but someone else also knew that Fenner was a crook.

"That man compelled Fenner to question Downing about a missing diamond. He even submitted Downing to some rather drastic physical torment to make him talk because Fenner had to get that stone. If he failed, his own life was in jeopardy. It was a peculiar turn of events for Fenner also was endangered no matter what happened. If Downing got free, he'd have accused Fenner of leading the hunchbacked men and had a strong case against him, too."

CAROL parked the car and followed the Black Bat through the hidden entrance to the house. There, Tony Quinn went directly into the library and dialed the number of Attorney Fenner's home.

Silk answered and his voice carried a worried note which disappeared when he heard Tony Quinn's voice.

"Yes, I made it," Quinn said. "No time to talk about it now. Tell Butch I've some more strong-arm work. Be certain that Fenner and Downing can't get away. Take Downing's keys away from him.

Then go with Butch to Downing's house. Post yourselves inside in convenient positions and wait.

"In a little while, the hunchbacked mob will appear. They'll come in force but they'll enter the house two at a time. Just right for Butch to handle. I want them all. Not one must get away. Is that clear?"

"It's not only clear," Silk grunted, "but it's a pleasure, sir. What'll we do with the remains, sir?"

"Bring along something to tie them up with. Make certain they can't help one another escape and, after you've finished, leave the house and report immediately to the laboratory."

Silk hung up at the other end. Butch heard the news and gave a lusty shout. Then his face grew serious.

"When do we start for Downing's house? I was just gettin' practice back there at the warehouse."

Silk paid brief visits to Fenner and Downing. Both were tied up, one on the second floor and the other in the cellar. They were efficiently gagged and restrained from moving at all by ropes.

Silk and Butch piled into the car and pointed its nose toward Jim Downing's home.

Neither spoke a word during the ride. Silk was busy thinking things out, trying to pin down the real brains behind all this. Butch was occupied with more primitive ideas. He massaged his knuckles and kept grinning broadly. They concealed the ear, entered Downing's home and Silk looked around.

"I haven't the least idea as to how the Black Bat expects to make these men enter the house two at a time," he said. "Yet, that's what he told me. If they all come at once, we'll be in a bad spot. Suppose you just step into that doorway, Butch. As they pass by, you can get your hands on them. Work fast and don't make any noise."

Silk grew more and more worried as time went by. It would be daylight in an hour now. The Black Bat had to finish the case before then or suspend operations. The gang was badly broken up now. The leader might decide to take what loot he already had and run for it.

Then two cars stopped outside. One by one, hunchbacked killers emerged, ran lightly into the darkness of the estate and waited until they were all congregated in one body. Monk, the squat leader, seemed to be talking. To Silk's horror, they all headed for the house in one group. Even Butch couldn't handle them all. They were confirmed killers, well armed and prepared to shoot it out with anyone.

SUDDENLY, the squat leader held up his hand. He stood rigid and silent for fully two minutes. Then he summoned the others by jerking his head toward a huge, overhanging tree.

"When are they comin'?" Butch asked hoarsely. "My fingers is goin' to sleep waitin'."

"I don't know," Silk replied. "I just witnessed one of the most amazing things I've ever seen. They intended to enter as a group, but something stopped them, just as the Black Bat prophesied. Butch, get set! Yes, they are—they're going to enter two by two."

Outside the house, Monk gave his final orders to the mob.

"The big-shot pays off tonight," he told the others. "In cold cash, twenty-five grand for each one of you lugs. More dough than you ever saw before. He says we are to enter the house for the payoff, but only two at a time. There's to be an interval of three minutes and then the second pair goes in. That's so you mugs can't see each other even after the job is all finished.

"You take your dough and leave by the back door. When you get to the street, take off them humps, the hats and scarfs and scram. Any mug who don't travel alone gets plugged. Okay, you two start." He tapped a pair of his men on their arms. They started for the house eagerly. They climbed the steps, crossed the porch and found the front door slightly ajar. They walked in boldly, tried to penetrate the darkness within and hesitated.

"Just follow the corridor," a voice came out of the gloom. "Straight ahead."

Both men gave grunts of approval and headed for the direction of the voice. They never did know just what happened after that.

Each man realized that something which felt like the scoop of a steam shovel, closed around their necks, choking off any attempt to scream a warning. Then their heads came together with a thump. Three minutes passed and another pair entered to meet the same fate. The third set was dispatched quietly. Then Monk squared his shoulders and spoke to his companion as they headed for the porch.

"I said if you stuck with me, you'd roll in dough. Now it's comin' true, see? The big-shot will count twenty-five grand right in your hand and it's all over. You don't know nothin'. If the cops pick up any of the other boys, what'll they say? Not one damn word because they don't know what it's all about any more than you. Let's go!"

Monk knew that his companion walked beside him down the hall and then, he suddenly realized that he was quite alone.

Monk gave a savage growl and reached for his gun. Then he was hurled against a wall. Out of the darkness, stalked a form which loomed up like a giant. A low, growling voice made Monk's blood run thin and cold.

"You're the mug who is the boss, huh? I got

some special treatment for you. Here's a sample."

A fist cracked against Monk's cheek and sent him reeling into a corner. He made a grab for his hip pocket. but the giant was on him before he could get the weapon free. Monk was seized by the throat and held dangling off the floor.

Very suddenly he discovered that he had been turned upside down. The gun fell out of his pocket. So did various possessions including a pair of brass knuckles and a deadly looking blackjack.

"Lemme go," Monk yelled. "I give up! I'll talk! Don't sock me again!"

Monk sailed through the air for a short space, landed against the wall again and cowered near the floor, blubbering pleas for mercy. He was yanked to his feet once more, pressed against the wall and then a fist came out of the darkness to smash squarely against his jaw. His head bobbed back under the impact, struck the wall and Monk went to sleep.

Butch let him slump to the floor and rubbed his hands.

"Tough guy, wasn't he?" he said contemptuously. "Tough as cream cheese! I figured he'd put up a scrap and give me some fun. 'Stead of that he turned yellow. Oh well, maybe he'll come to before the Black Bat tells us what to do with him. Then I can mess him up a little more."

CHAPTER XXI
The Bat Turns Burglar

RAPIDLY Tony Quinn donned the Black Bat's outfit again, cautioned Carol to watch out for Lieutenant McGrath and then he opened a locked cabinet and removed a small bottle of white liquid. He wrapped this in cotton, put it in his pocket and departed.

Carol's car was still parked near the estate. He drove it straight toward the center of the city. Without a wasted motion, he left the car, ran down an alley and reached the back door of a store.

There was no time to cut burglar alarm systems. He withdrew the bottle of liquid, replaced the cork with another that had two fine wires strung from it. He hooked these to a small board which had a pair of batteries attached. Then he limply raised one foot and kicked in the glass part of the back door. He unlocked it, heard the burglar alarm system go into action and as he raced through the spacious store, he swept stock from counters, smashed in display cases with the butt of his gun and only stopped when he reached the big safe.

He thrust the bottle beneath it, strung the fine wires out as he retreated toward the back door and paid no attention to the shrill sound of a police whistle that rose above the din of the clanging alarm.

On the rear platform he stopped long enough to touch two wires together. Inside the store there was a terrific explosion, a blinding sheet of white fire and then a grim silence broken only by an occasional crackle of broken glass as it fell to the floor.

His eyes twinkled knowingly.

A patrolman swept around the back of the building, gun in hand. He saw nothing for it was still very dark and the Black Bat's black-clad form was not to be distinguished. He vaulted over a fence, streaked madly through other rear courtyards and finally reached his parked car. By the time radio police and protective agency guards showed up, he was ten blocks away and there was a grin on his face.

He whipped around a corner, fighting time now, for everything had to be finished before dawn would make his movements difficult. When he reached the other side of town, he stopped the car, got out and merged with the gloom once more. He advanced toward a stately looking house, alert for any signs of guards or traps. Reaching a spot four feet from the driveway, he crouched behind a thick bush and waited. The Black Bat's work was almost finished.

While this went on, another man received startling news over the phone. Alex Pierce awoke with a start, grabbed the instrument and heard a police sergeant describe the bad news.

"Your store was just busted open. Somebody blasted the safe, but he didn't have time to pry the door open so your stock is okay. You better come down. The store is an awful mess, Mr. Pierce."

"I'll be there in ten minutes," Pierce answered.

He hung up, slipped out of his pajamas and threw on his clothes as he hurried downstairs. He wrung his hands at the destruction in his store, but the police sergeant was right. The burglar seemed to have hoped that one blast of explosive would blow the safe wide open. Pierce had spent a lot of money on that safe. Now it seemed as though his investment had been wise.

"I don't know what's missing yet," he told the sergeant. "The most valuable part of the stock was in the safe so that's okay. I'll arrange with the protective agency to throw a cordon of men around the store. In the morning, I'll have my clerks check carefully and submit a list of what is missing. I'm grateful for your fast work, Sergeant. You probably saved me a tremendous loss."

PIERCE wore a very puzzled look as he got

back into his car. He broke every speed law to get back home and he didn't wait to roll the car in the garage. Instead, he nosed it in to the curb, jumped out and raced madly for the front door. It was locked and he heaved a sigh as he inserted the key.

But when he stepped into the living room, he began cursing, slowly and steadily. The havoc wrought at his store was nothing compared to the cyclone which had swept through this room. Chairs were overturned and their cushions slit open. Rugs were rolled up. Pictures hung askew. The contents of his bookcase was dumped on the floor.

Pierce didn't hurry to the telephone. He never thought of summoning the police. Instead, he headed directly toward the fireplace. His finger slid beneath the mantelpiece, found a hidden switch and pressed it. A section of bricks swung back to reveal the shiny surface of a hidden safe.

Pierce reached for the dial, hesitated and looked around carefully. Then he turned the combination with fingers that shook so badly that he missed one of the numbers and had to start over again. At last, the door opened. He reached into the safe and removed a thick, plush-covered box. He snapped the spring and the lid flew back with a soft click.

"Much obliged," someone said with quiet satisfaction. "Now let's have a look at the five stones of the Rajah's garland."

Pierce turned around very slowly. Commissioner Warner and Lieutenant McGrath had quietly stepped across the hallway and entered the room. McGrath had a service pistol trained on Pierce.

"The Rajah's garland?" Pierce asked in awe. "What—what in the world do you mean? This is no time for jokes. gentlemen. My store was looted a few moments ago. During my absence from the house, someone entered and—well, you can see for yourselves what happened."

"What's in the box?" McGrath asked as he advanced toward Pierce.

"A necklace," Pierce answered promptly. "It is worth a hundred thousand dollars and belongs to one of my best clients. I had it restrung and took it home to make a careful examination of the pearls. That's what worried me so when I came back to find my house invaded. Loss of this would have floored me financially." Pierce walked over to his desk and placed the box on it. Warner and McGrath approached, looked at the pearl necklace it contained and then looked at one another. McGrath reached out to pick up the box. There was mingled surprise and confusion on his face. McGrath forgot that he might be facing a very dangerous man.

"Don't touch it!" Pierce snapped. "Drop your gun, you stupid lummox. Drop it or I'll drill you!"

While Warner and McGrath had concentrated their attention on the plush box and the necklace, Pierce had found an opportunity to lift a heavy automatic out of his desk drawer. He had both police officers covered.

"So you thought you'd land me with a trick like this. Hasn't it occurred to you that I'm a man with brains, that I can outwit any police officer in the world? I'm making no admissions. I don't know why you resorted to this trickery, but it really makes no difference because I'm going to kill both of you.

"Your bodies will be hidden and never found. I have a perfect alibi. Just a few moments ago, I left a score of your own men. The moment you are dead, I shall report this burglary. I drove here very fast, suspecting there was something up. Under ordinary circumstances I should be just arriving. You'll be dead. Your own men will back up my story if I am suspected of killing you—which I won't be.

"So, gentlemen, I'm afraid this is the finish. By permitting you to live, I place my own neck in a hangman's noose and I'm very susceptible to things like that."

"Or like this?" a voice breathed into his ear.

There was a gun muzzle pressed gently, but firmly against the back of his neck.

GUN hand shaking, his eyes wide in fear, Pierce froze. McGrath made a lunge and, with one blow, knocked the weapon out of Pierce's palsied grip. Pierce turned around, gulped and found that he couldn't even protest his innocence.

The Black Bat stood directly behind him. He motioned toward McGrath.

"Open the rest of that plush jewelry case," he suggested. "It's the thickest jewelry box I've ever seen."

McGrath fumbled with the box and six stones rolled out on the desk, throwing rainbow hues all over the room. The Black Bat nodded in satisfaction.

"Looks like the evidence will convict you, Pierce," he said.

"I—I don't know anything about it," Pierce wailed. "I never saw those stones before in my life. Wait! I know how they got there. The hunchbacked killers! They robbed me! They hid them there."

"Your train of thought is so fast it's crude," the Black Bat said. "Sit down, Pierce, and listen to the story which spells your finish. Hollis and Kilpatrick received certain articles from the Rajah of Bahawal. So did you and the other men victimized in this case. Hollis and Kilpatrick, purely by accident, discovered that the articles contained jewels which, when assembled form the garland

of *Siva*, probably the most valuable collection of gems in the world."

"But—but I didn't know that," Pierce cried. "How could I know?"

"You could have found out by accident the way Hollis and Kilpatrick did. But actually you learned through the treachery of Jim Downing. Kilpatrick made his discovery and promptly hid the diamond he found in the secret room of his house where protection was better. Then he told Downing about it. Kilpatrick had been shown the Garland when he visited Bahawal and he recognized the single stone. Downing knew about the secret room and removed the stone.

"He took it to your jewelry store and asked you to have a copy made. He told you that Kilpatrick had been presented with the gem and realized it was too valuable for show. Therefore, he wanted a copy to display. That was when you first realized what had happened. You found one of the gems in the trinket the Rajah had lent you. Then you set about getting all the gems for yourself. You found it very easy to hire men who would carry out your orders, even when they involved murder!"

"Can't you see how foolish all this is?" Pierce asked McGrath and Warner. "I'm a respectable jeweler. I have nothing in common with murderers and thieves."

"Nothing except the fact that you are probably the biggest fence in the country," the Black Bat said. "You arranged that your men would disguise themselves as hunchbacks to be certain everyone would know that one gang was committing the crimes. You killed Hollis and Kilpatrick because they knew what you were after.

"The others, without knowledge as to what the Rajah's gifts contained, only believed that these articles were stolen along with a lot of other things. You wanted this series of crimes to look like the work of a mob intent simply on getting loot!"

PIERCE jumped to his feet. The Black Bat's gun swung around significantly and he sat down again. "Dr. Norden grew suspicious," the Black Bat went on. "He examined the article which the Rajah had sent, found the stone it contained and became so frightened that he hurried to a bank and put it in a safe deposit vault. Your men had him under observation and you ordered a raid on the bank. You intended to rob his house but you delayed too long. You then planned to murder him but things got too hot."

"But I have an alibi for the time when Hollis and Kilpatrick were murdered," Pierce protested wildly. "Why, I was even menaced by these hunchbacked men myself!"

"Faked," the Black Bat answered. "Your identity wasn't known to any of the killers except Monk. You merely gave orders that they were to rob you and the job did look real. You let Downing live because he looked like a good fall guy."

"And you still haven't evidence against me," Pierce yelled belligerently. "I can prove I was at home when those robberies were committed. You can't tie me up with that gang."

"Yes, I can," the Black Bat said softly. "Upstairs, in one of your rooms, you have a shortwave radio transmitter. You used this to direct the movements of your men. The humps on their backs served another purpose than simply to identify them. Certain of the crooks had receiving sets concealed in their humps. They used a small earphone which was hidden by the big hat and the scarf you provided them with.

"When you attended the meeting at Downing's house, you got away from the hunchbacked killers very smoothly, because Monk, the leader, knew you and permitted you to get away. All of you forgot that I can see quite well in darkness. I watched Monk signal you to escape. You rushed home, contacted your men by radio and told them of the secret room which others of your men learned of from Kilpatrick. They made him tell that his stone was hidden there. Of course that stone was only the copy Downing had made. Yet I still had no concrete evidence!"

Warner stepped forward. "Have you any now? The radio set will help, but it's not enough to convince a jury."

The Black Bat laughed. "At the home of Jim Downing you will find all of what's left of Pierce's gang. Some of them have the receiving sets, tuned in to the wavelength which corresponds to the set upstairs. That was how those killers knew in advance when police were on the march. Pierce simply listened to police broadcasts and relayed the information to his men.

"The hunchbacks always operated in pairs. One of the pair had a receiving set, The other was to hold off anyone who tried to effect a capture so that his pal could get free and the receiving set would never be found. That's why, when we managed to grab some of the killers, they never wore a set."

"That's enough," Warner grated. "We have Pierce right where we want him."

"Wait," the Black Bat interrupted. "One more little detail. Among the gems on the desk is a diamond. It's phony! That stone was taken out of Kilpatrick's secret room. Downing put it there and appropriated the real one. The Rajah has this stone now.

"The fake one was made in Pierce's store, by one of his trusted aides. I've already examined it while Pierce was busy at his store a few moments

ago. Every gem craftsman marks phony stones. Pierce's man did, too. You can pick him up any time. You will also find Downing tied up in Fenner's home and more than willing to talk. Downing's testimony will easily convict Pierce. Fenner is there also.

"Pierce knew Fenner was shady and through Monk forced Fenner to help. But Fenner still doesn't know that Pierce is behind it. Monk. the leader of the hunchbacks, handled Fenner. I imagine that Pierce was holding Fenner as a fall guy to take the blame if things went sour just as he kept Downing in reserve for the same reason."

McGrath snapped handcuffs on Pierce's wrists. He yanked the man to his feet.

"About Downing," the Black Bat said, "don't handle him too roughly. At heart, he's not so bad. He tried to send the diamond back to the Rajah and he knew of his arrival by some rather good checking of incoming ships. As for Pierce, he deserves no breaks of any kind. He ordered his men to torture Kilpatrick when they couldn't find the diamond. He has displayed animal ruthlessness all through the case. Lieutenant, have you a very firm grasp on your prisoner?"

"He couldn't get away if he was Tarzan," McGrath grunted.

Suddenly the lights winked out. No one moved. Three minutes passed and Warner turned the lights on again. The Black Bat was gone!

IT was broad daylight when Tony Quinn sat in his study and puffed on his pipe. Carol and Butch were gone. Silk bustled about as though the day was just beginning for him. Neither he nor Quinn showed the slightest trace of weariness.

McGrath and Warner arrived at ten o'clock. Quinn listened to Warner describe what had happened. McGrath was strangely silent until he was ready to leave. Then he faced Quinn, looking down into those dead eyes.

"I'm a soft sap," he said with a strange grin. "I had the Black Bat cornered and I let him go. Of course, it paid dividends because we have the whole gang and I'm getting credit for it all. Have a squint at this."

He held out a shiny gold badge. Quinn's expression never changed, his eyes didn't focus on the badge. McGrath blinked and put the badge back into his pocket.

"Sorry, I forgot you can't see. But it's Captain McGrath now. What do you think of that?"

Quinn extended his hand. "I think it's great. Much more comforting to be accused of being the Black Bat by a captain of detectives instead of a lieutenant!"

"Yeah?" McGrath barked. "Catching the Black Bat will make me an inspector and don't forget that."

As they filed out of the room, Warner looked over his shoulder and winked deliberately at Quinn. But there was no response from the blind man.

Both police officers were helped into their coats by Silk. They walked out to the car. McGrath got behind the wheel.

McGrath cleared his throat.

"Say, Commissioner, I haven't had time to thank you for the promotion. Gosh, I only made those mugs talk. The Black Bat really got them."

"I know," Warner said. "The promotion was not for your work in extracting confessions. You became a captain because you used your brains for once—by letting the Black Bat escape."

Silk watched them drive away. He seemed to droop as the car vanished from sight. Tony Quinn too had relaxed.

"We'd better get some rest," he said.

"Yes, sir," Silk agreed. "But really, sir, a few hours rest will suffice if there is something else going on—"

"There is," Quinn answered as he walked slowly across the room. "We don't know what it is yet, but crime is everlastingly brewing. When it boils over, the Black Bat will have to awaken." He yawned. "I hope it just simmers for two whole days."

THE END

Coming soon in THE BLACK BAT #6:

The Black Bat and the Trojan Horse
and The Black Bat's Dragon Trail

• Plus another adventure of *The Mask* from the Golden Age of Comics •

THE BELFRY by Will Murray

Dramatic change marks our two Black Bat exploits this volume. Also with this edition, the spotlight returns to series originator, Norman Arthur Daniels, the writer most often behind the house name G. Wayman Jones.

The year is 1940, and the Black Bat is in his second year battling crime and subversion. After approximately seven years working for the Thrilling pulp house, Daniels, who had seemingly been in ascendancy back in 1934-1936 when he was regularly ghosting *Phantom Detective* novels under the byline of "Robert Wallace," had gone into eclipse. He stopped receiving lead-novel assignments after two of his Phantoms, *Dealers in Death* and *The Specter of Death*, had to be revised by other writers. This coincided, ironically enough, with the hiring of editor Mort Weisinger, who had a low opinion of Daniels as a writer. The irony is that less than a decade in the future, Weisinger would be hired by DC Comics to edit Batman!

"Daniels' real name was Danberg," Weisinger recalled decades later. "He was a prolific hack, occasionally turning out a good yarn, but most of his product was run-of-the mill."

Yet, by the closing months of 1939, it was clear that his Black Bat novels running in *Black Book Detective* magazine were a big hit. Norman Daniels was redeemed as a pulp novelist.

Suddenly, Daniels was put to work creating new series galore. Candid Camera Kid was launched in *Detective Novels*, and was soon joined by the Crimson Mask, the latter a knockoff of Thrilling's long-running *Phantom Detective* series. Daniels was given his first Phantom novel to write since 1936, *Murder Rides the Skies*. In 1940, he contributed his first Dan Fowler story for *G-Men Detective*, *The Convention Murders*, and in April, under the house name of "C. K. M. Scanlon," Daniels inaugurated the *Masked Detective* series, which had its own magazine. It was another *Phantom Detective* knockoff. Daniels would contribute about half of the series, backed up by other writers.

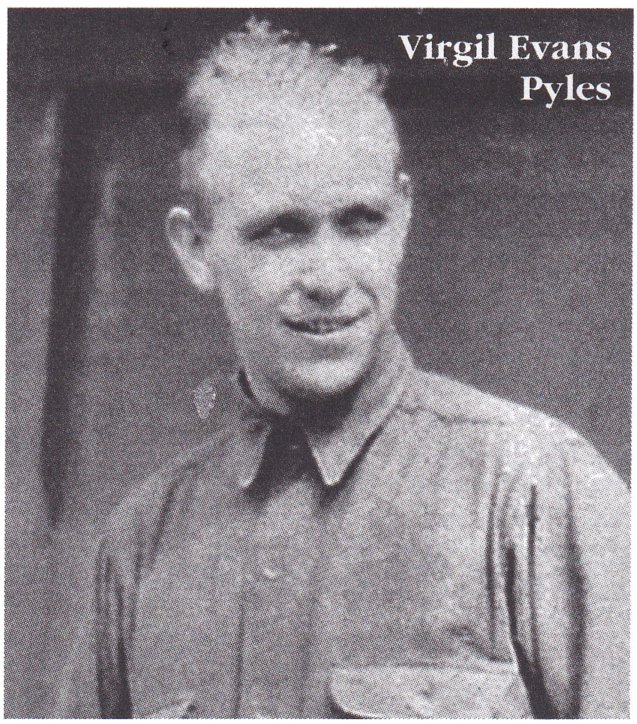
During this extremely busy period, Thrilling editor-in-chief Leo Margulies gave another writer a Black Bat novel, but Daniels was back with *The Black Bat's Triumph*.

In *The Black Bat's Triumph*, author Norman Daniels takes a break from his Fifth Column plots and turns out a colorful crime story of the type Walter Gibson was producing every two weeks for *The Shadow*. Daniels introduces an element that, while bizarre, was an oft-used device in pulp and even dime novel days.

During the ancient era of Nick Carter dime novels, Nick sometimes pretended to be a hunchback, strapping on a hollow, disfiguring hump.

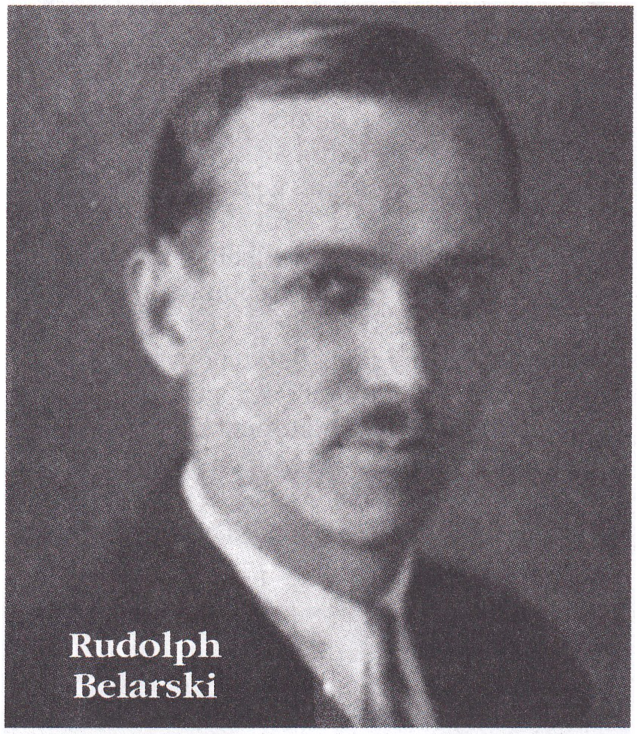
The idea of a group of villains pretending to be hunchbacks, wearing artificial humps packed with special equipment, is not new. It goes back to Doc Savage and Lester Dent's 1936 novel, *The Vanisher*. The hunchbacked villain of that wild tale concealed a complicated teleportation apparatus in his twisted back.

More than likely this 1940 innovation is a nod in the direction of Norvell Page's the *Spider*, who also sometimes wore a false hunchback appliance as part of his disguise. Virgil Evans Pyles' interior art makes the villains look like The Shadow, but of course the *Spider* and The Shadow both resembled one another.



Pyles had replaced original interior artist Harry Parkhurst, and would shortly add cover art chores to his Black Bat commitment. As a result of permitting the Black Bat to escape and solve the case, Lieutenant McGrath was promoted to captain in the story—although sometimes this seemingly indelible fact would be forgotten in future installments. But his perpetually antagonistic relationship with former D. A. Tony Quinn would continue unchanged.

We jump ahead three years for our second novel, chosen in part because of its striking Rudolph Belarski cover. It was not often that the Black Bat was depicted in full regalia on the covers of *Black Book Detective*, and this is one of the more powerful illustrations of the bat-cloaked mystery man in action. Belarski was one of the top artists in the pulp field, and he really knocked



it out of the park with this one, as he did with his first Black Bat cover, *Murder Calls the Bat*, which was the character's second appearance and the first time he was painted as more than a looming hooded face on the covers.

Belarski painted comparatively few Black Bat covers in total, but every time he did, it was a knockout.

The year is now 1943 and America is at war. Daniels' frequent Fifth Column stories have now taken on greater urgency—and plausibility.

Markets of Treason was written in January of that year, and it marked a turning point in the series. In this transitional novel, Tony Quinn decides to modify his appearance as the Black Bat. This decision is prompted by an interesting new development on the part of Captain McGrath's unending quest to unmask the Black Bat, whom he correctly suspects is former District Attorney Anthony Quinn. Although the cover to *Markets of Treason* shows the Black Bat in his most Batmanesque form, in the story, Norman Daniels —working with Captain McGrath—contrived to deprive the Nemesis of Crime of his signature ribbed cloak. We don't want to give away too much of the story, but pay close attention to the dog on the cover. Her name is Gwendolyn. A giant Great Dane-Saint Bernard mix, she is poised to change the way the Black Bat does business forevermore. Gwendolyn will return for a future case.

You'll have to turn the page to discover these details. The story marks another new era in the ongoing saga of Tony Quinn.

Markets of Treason was published in the Winter 1944 issue of *Black Book Detective*. Wartime paper shortages will soon kill companion title, *Detective Novels*, as it had *The Masked Detective* magazine. *Black Book Detective* was now reduced in frequency to a quarterly. During this year, many magazines would fall by the wayside under the burdensome crush of chronic paper shortages brought about by wartime demands for increasingly scarce pulp paper.

Norman Daniels will sail through most of this unscathed. For with this period, he will return to *The Phantom Detective* series and write a great many of the upcoming novels, as he will for the Dan Fowler lead feature in *G-Men Detective*. •

Tony Quinn Battles to Smash a Criminal Crew of Traitors Aligned in a Deadly Fifth Column

IN

THE BLACK BAT AND THE TROJAN HORSE

A Complete Book-Length Novel by G. WAYMAN JONES

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

The light of the match revealed the Black Bat. (CHAPTER VI)

MARKETS OF TREASON

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Tony Quinn Tackles the Toughest Racket He's Ever Tried to Smash When a Crew of Ex-Bootleggers Band Together to Make a Squeeze-Play on Commodities!

CHAPTER I
Return of Terror

A POLICE radio car pulled up near the entrance to a large house where taxis were disgorging smartly dressed passengers. Many were well known people. Some of the women were less well known and seemed a trifle too uttra in dress and makeup. Some *of* the men were well muffled up, keeping their heads turned from the police car.

"What's all this, Casey?" one cop asked the other.

"Reggie Archer is giving a Victory Ball," the driver said. "All the best are supposed to attend, but I'll bet some don't show up. Not after what Archer did. Can you imagine a rat so low as to get himself a government job, then sell favors?"

The other cop chuckled. "I'll say one thing—they're not pulling up in swank limousines. Gas rationing. Hey! Look at those two birds. They act as if they'd busted out of prison last week. Can't even see their noses."

Casey turned the car away from the curb.

"Don't worry. Archer is watching his step these

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH BLACK BAT NOVEL

days. Swears he has reformed, and this Victory Ball is his first gesture of repentance. But I don't like the air around here. Let's go."

Inside the big house, slender, dapper Reggie Archer greeted his guests, calling most of them by name. He had a remarkable ability for remembering people. But there were a few—perhaps a dozen—who seemed to be complete strangers. However, Archer greeted them pleasantly, and they went on to mingle with his other guests.

Part of the affair overran the big ballroom and into the garden. The men whom Archer didn't know made their way into that garden, one by one. Idly sauntering through the paths, they soon vanished.

One of the last to disappear was an ugly-looking brute with a twisted nose and heavy brow. He looked rather like a fairly intelligent baboon. As he walked along one of the paths, he kept glancing down. Then, at the foot of one tree, he saw a piece of paper apparently tossed away by some careless guest. The paper had been torn into the shape of an arrow, and it pointed to the left.

He turned left, walked a little further and found another bit of paper. To him, they became directional signs and he realized they had led him off the property.

"Hold it, Bud," someone said.

THE thug stopped automatically. A flashlight was turned on for a second.

"Okay," someone said. "It's Pixie Pax. Keep going, Pixie. You'll find a garage just ahead. The meeting takes place above it. But you can search me why they ever asked you to come."

"Wasn't I a big-shot too once?" Pixie demanded irately.

"Sure," the man in the darkness said. "You ran a pretty swell rum racket and made a lot of dough, but it's different today. You don't machine-gun guys you don't like. You use kid gloves and, Pixie, there isn't a pair of kid gloves made to fit those hams of yours."

Pixie growled something and walked toward the garage. One of the big doors was ajar and he slipped inside and climbed to the second floor, a sort of game room, where an even dozen men waited, uncomfortable in starched shirts and bow ties.

"Close the door, Pixie," ordered one burly man who faced the group. "And next time there's a meeting, make it snappier. We've got to get back to the party before we're missed."

"Okay, Fraser," Pixie said and closed the door,

Fraser spoke sternly for silence and began talking.

"All of you know why we are here. We couldn't meet openly and this Victory Ball provided a way for us to get together. Anybody with the proper clothes and ticket was let in. Nobody will miss us, because nobody knows us. The cops have had their eyes on us so long we have to be careful. In the old days, we paid off the cops to look the other way, but those days are gone."

"And maybe we don't know it," a man groaned.

"Shut up," Fraser growled. "We all made fortunes during Prohibition, but since then, we've lived as best we could. Now, boys, something new is in the wind. People didn't want Prohibition so they bought our stuff, paid fancy prices for it. Well, there are a lot of things today people want and will pay plenty for. Coffee, gasoline, butter, meats, canned stuff. Lots of other things. What's eating you, Russ Bowman?"

Bowman, a man whose hair was gray at the temples, spoke up.

"We're bucking the old gent with the whiskers if we start Black Market operations, Fraser. This time the people won't be on our side."

"Aw, you always were a beefer," Fraser derided. "Listen—people will buy rationed stuff just as they bought hooch. They—"

"But this happens to be war, Fraser," Russ Bowman said. "If we don't win it, even crooks like us will be wiped out with the rest."

Fraser crooked his finger and two men hurried to him. He spoke in a whisper.

The pair walked toward Bowman and suddenly seized his arms. He was searched, then slapped against the wall with a gun buried in his midriff.

Fraser scowled. "We figured you was a right guy, Bowman. But it seems you're a rat, and we know how to take care of rats. Watch him, boys."

Fraser continued to speak to the others, telling them of the success of small Black Markets and how an organized band of experts in getting hold of illicit goods, could reap a fortune.

"Not only that," Fraser went on, "but we got a big-shot back of us. So big none of you will ever see him. But be knows what's going on and he bosses the outfit. This time we don't shoot each other up but work together. There's more dough in this racket than there ever was in booze. That's all. Except for Russ Bowman. I don't know what to do about him."

"Don't you?" a voice came from outside the closed door. "I do, Fraser. He's weak. Kill him."

RUSS BOWMAN didn't move, but he knew he had heard his death sentence—in the voice of the big-shot, about whom Fraser had been boasting.

"That was the guy I was telling you about," Fraser rapped out. "Remember him—if you ever go soft. Pixie, you stay here. The rest of you go

back to the party and stick around for awhile. Then get your dames and beat it."

They filed out to go back to the Victory Ball while Pixie Pax, grinning somewhat on the wolfish side, listened to orders.

"You used to be pretty good at getting rid of guys without the cops knowing whether it was suicide, murder or an accident," Fraser said. "I leave Russ Bowman to you."

"Sure," Pixie grimaced, "I hate rats ... Boys, gag him. We'll take him to his own home—on the twenty-second floor—and figure out what we do with him."

Whisking Bowman to a waiting taxi was done with neatness. Shortly, the cab stopped at a delivery entrance to a tall building. Bowman was thrust into a service elevator and a few moments later Pixie opened the door of Bowman's apartment.

He removed the gag and shoved Bowman back against the sill of an open window.

"Well, now we think up some way so the cops will never get wise that Russ was knocked off." Pixie rubbed his bands. "Any suggestions, Russ? You always were a pretty smart guy."

Russ Bowman was pale, He didn't have a chance and knew it. Pixie was a fiend when it came to killing.

"I have no suggestions," Bowman said softly. "But I do have something to say. It might pay you mugs to hear it."

"Sure," Pixie grinned. "A last statement, huh? But it won't do you any good, Russ. We got too much at stake to trust a rat."

"Listen," Bowman said firmly, "I can't stop you from killing mc. Murder in the old bootlegging days was as enjoyable to men like you, Pixie, as taking in the money. But you mugs never had a brain in your head. Not even Fraser, though he's smooth and dangerous. You can't seem to realize things are different today. It's not like Prohibition. Yes, there are people who will pay all kinds of crazy sums for rationed goods. They think more of a pot of coffee than they do of soldiers who are dying so that scum like you—and yes, me—can live."

"That all?" Pixie asked.

"Not quite. The odds are against you. And you can't overcome them with machine-guns or blackjacks or brass knuckles. There's a secret weapon in the hands of men who will fight traitors like you. And unknown men who will wield it. Wait and see. I know what I'm talking about!"

Pixie grinned derisively. "Let's get down to business. How do we polish off this loud mouth? Neat, I mean, Watch him, boys, while I figure out a way."

Pixie took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, paced by Bowman and the pack fell out of his hand. He bent down as if to pick them up. Turning slightly, he seized Bowman's legs snd boisted him up and over the window sill. He let go end Russ Bowman went sailing through space. A shriek came from his lips.

"Scram!" Pixie snapped and all three murderers hurried out of the apartment, first taking care to wipe fingerprints off doorknobs.

On the sidewalk, Pixie and his two companions strolled away. He strutted because people stared at him in his tuxedo. Pixie didn't know how funny a gorilla looks in formal clothes.

Then Pixie frowned, until his shaggy eyebrows formed a straight line across his forehead.

"I wonder what Bowman meant about a secret weapon and guys we don't know who'll use it against us? I ... Hey, you don't think he meant the Black Bat? Boys, if the Black Bat ever finds out we knocked off Bowman, he'll start hunting for us. He's worse than the cops and the G-men. Bowman must have meant the Black Bat, and if he's got a secret weapon—"

Pixie forgot to strut.

CHAPTER II
Rationing Board

OBVIOUSLY, the citizen of these United States who banged open the door of the Rationing Board Number Eleven was pretty angry. He strode up to a clerk who smiled and indicated she was at his service.

"My name is Green!" he snapped. "Amos Green. Some dumb O.P.A. investigator took away my gasoline rationing book and said I had to report here if I wanted it back. I object to such high-handed methods. Who is this country fighting? Hitler or its own citizens? That's what I want to know."

The clerk indicated a closed door. "You may raise your objections to the gentleman in there. His name is Quinn. I'm sure you will be treated fairly."

Green walked rapidly into the room and saw a man of about thirty seated behind a desk. He was a man who would have heen striking in appearance had it not been for deep, vivid scars around his eyes.

"Are you Quinn?" Green demanded. "Yes," Tony Quinn replied. "Please sit down, Mr. Green. I know your name. You broadcast it quite plainly from the other room. So—your gasoline rationing card was taken away from you. Under what circumstances?"

"I had to drive in to see my dentist. When I came out, this investigator was there. Since when

can a snoop say whether or not a man drives his car? I—"

"But, Mr. Green, you didn't visit your dentist. The doctor whose name you gave never heard of you. It seems you came out of a place where considerable gambling is done. Isn't that the truth?"

Green gaped. "You mean that investigator actually wasted taxpayers' money to investigate my statement? That's a fine thing! Cops are supposed to protect us, not persecute us."

"You used gasoline to visit a place and gamble, Mr, Green," said Quinn. "This morning's paper features a story about one of our tankers being sunk by a submarine. Thirty-odd men were forced to swim through water, covered with flaming fuel. Six survived. The others—well, they're heroes, but dead heroes, Do you know why?"

GREEN shuffled his feet nervously and didn't reply.

"Those men died to bring gasoline here, fuel needed by vital industries, for use in ambulances and fire trucks. Not to be used by men driving from one gambling place to another."

"You're right, of course," Green admitted ruefully. "But I have to get to work now. I'll show you my papers. I work on a war job."

Quinn smiled. "I'll take your word for it. I'm blind."

Green fumbled with his papers. "Oh gosh! I didn't realize—"

"It's all right," Quinn said. "Now about your case again. You can reach your work by bus. A bit overcrowded, perhaps, but army transports are crowded too. So are slit trenches, and a tank isn't exactly a Pullman. Suppose you do without a car —except for real emergencies, Mr. Green?"

Green frowned. "Okay. But Mr. Quinn, I can buy gas. All I want and I don't need any tickets?"

"Where?" Quinn asked quickly.

"Well, I'm not saying. I've never bought any myself, but I know people who have. Gas is forty cents a gallon. Sometimes a little more than that. If I can go out and buy it, why should I care if you stop me from buying the stuff legally?"

QUINN tapped his fingertips together gently.

"But you do care, Mr. Green. That gasoline may also have cost the lives of men who bring it here. Buying from a Black Market doesn't relieve you of any responsibility. The crooks who sell that gasoline don't manufacture it here."

Green sighed. "I guess I can't argue that point. Best thing to do is either put my car on blocks or sell it. Brother, I'm not driving any more on fuel that cost men their lives. Thanks for putting me straight. You can tear up that ration card."

As Green went out, Tony Quinn ran fingers through his hair and sighed. Green was no exception. People streamed in and out of the rationing office all day with the same stories. Sometimes they bragged about getting Black Market goods; sometimes they told about it in a spirit of cooperation. But the Black Market existed, and was growing.

"Silk!" Quinn called.

A side door opened and a slender bald man who moved with the grace of a cat appeared. On his face was a deep scowl.

"I heard it," Silk Kirby said. "That guy should have been slapped in jail."

"Oh no. Silk. He just didn't fully understand the necessity for rationing certain goods. There's no harm in him, but there is in that Black Market he talked about. Bring the car around. I'm going home early tonight."

Nobody questioned Quinn's need for a car. The blind do not get around as readily as those with sight. Furthermore, most of his efforts were concerned with helping to fight the war.

Silk drove him home and stopped in front of a large house set in rather large, well-kept grounds, neatly fenced in. Well-cared-for shrubbery and trees decorated the place which obviously was the home of a man of means. Quinn was considered a wealthy man, and he conducted a lucrative law practice.

Silk helped him out of the car and piloted him through the gate, along a walk, and onto the porch.

Inside, when Silk unlocked the front door, the house was in darkness, but Tony Quinn walked through it without hitting anything. He dropped his cane onto a chair, flung his hat on top of it, and proceeded to his study where he sat down and picked up his pipe.

Silk turned out lights. Then he lowered the shades and stood by with a look of anticipation on his face.

"I know what you're thinking." Quinn smiled. "We should do something about this Black Market. Well—we're going to."

Tony Quinn's eyes, usually blank and staring, were alive and earnest now. Tony Quinn was not blind, although only three people knew that.

He had been blind. The accident that had blinded him horribly had occurred one day while Quinn was District Attorney. Crooks he had been prosecuting tried to destroy evidence by hurling corrosive acid upon it. Quinn had taken the acid squarely in the face. That was what had caused those ugly scars.

He had gone blind instantly. Then had come weeks of hopelessness while he visited surgeon

after surgeon, only to be told again and again that there was no chance of his regaining his sight.

During the months of agony that had followed, Quinn had patiently tried to improve his other senses. He developed his hearing into something far more acute than a normal man's. His sense of touch became phenomenal. But he still despaired, for he was young and healthy, and nothing could take the place of sight.

SILK had been with him during this crisis. Silk had been with him, ever since one night he had come to rob Tony Quinn. Instead, he had listened to Quinn's arguments, and had promptly turned from being a crook into Quinn's friend, until now he was one of his trusted aides.

Quinn had been hopeless in his blindness until one night a girl had come to his home. Her name was Carol Baldwin and she had a peculiar purpose in mind. Her father, a police officer, dying of a bullet wound inflicted by crooks, had seen an opportunity to do good before he died. He had selected Tony Quinn to benefit by his offer because Quinn's fame as a prosecutor had gone far.

So Tony Quinn secretly accompanied Carol Baldwin to a small town in the Mid-west. There, parts of her father's eyes had been grafted to the acid-scarred eyes of Tony Quinn. A modest country surgeon had done the job, completing it shortly before the death of Carol's father.

Then had come more agonizing weeks until one night Quinn removed the bandages. He could see once more and amazingly enough, nature—seemed to have added a sort of bonus for his suffering. Quinn's eyes were abnormal. He could make them look as though they were quite blind and yet, in the inkiest blackness he could see as well as in daylight. Faint colors were quite visible, and he could read fine print with light of any kind.

Quinn then determined to keep the secret of his cure, carry on as a blind man and assume a new identity—for the sole purpose of fighting crime and criminals. He became unknown to all but three persons, the Black Bat, a name he selected with some degree of irony over his former sightlessness. "Blind as a bat," he'd often called himself.

Wearing jet black clothing, with a hood snugly fitted over his head to hide those telltale scars and his features, he became a voluntary investigator—and Nemesis—in crime cases which baffled the police. A robe which he wore for its psychological effect, had ribs sewn in it, and it gave him the eerie appearance of a great bird in flight.

In that guise, Quinn had become known and dreaded by the underworld. The police sought him also, in his Black Bat role, for he cared nothing

THE BLACK BAT

for the red tape of the law. He shot when necessary, burglarized if by so doing he could outwit crooks. He battled them hard, and when it had to be, killers died at his hands.

Carol Baldwin had remained with him to aid him because her life also had been dedicated to the elimination of crime and criminals, after her father's death at their hands. A hulking man named Jack O'Leary also joined the little group when he displayed certain prowess essential to the activities of the Black Bat.

"Butch," as he was called, once a prize fighter and a veritable giant, liked nothing better than to crack the heads of crooks together.

And of course there was also the reformed confidence man, Silk Kirby.

Anonymity was necessary for the Black Bat's success. Should the underworld get the slightest hint that Tony Quinn was the Black Bat, that the former district attorney was not blind, then Quinn might not live long. And there was always the police to consider. Especially Captain McGrath of the Detective Bureau who had vowed fervently to track down and arrest the Black Bat. As a matter of fact, McGrath had long suspected Tony Quinn, but never had he been able to get his teeth into any evidence.

Quinn's aides also remained out of the limelight. Behind one wall of this study was a laboratory in which Tony Quinn did much of his research work in connection with running down criminals. That also served as a meeting place for the small band of crime chasers.

FROM the laboratory, a trapdoor led into a tunnel which ended at a garden house in the rear of the grounds. It was only a few steps from there to a side gate opening into a quiet street. By this means it was possible for Quinn, as the Black Bat, and his aides to leave the house unseen.

"Ever since I've been on that rationing board," Quinn was telling Silk now, "I have listened to complaints and threats. Most people see the light and are reasonable. But deprive others of their gasoline, give them only one cup of coffee a day, or cut down on their canned goods and meat, and they become highly insulted."

"They'd be shot in Germany," Silk said.

"They know they won't be here," Quinn said, "and are pretty defiant, some of them. Quite a few have hinted to me, when I wouldn't give them extra allotments, that they'd get them anyhow. And they will—from a Black Market that threatens to become a greater menace than the old bootleging rings."

Quinn lighted his pipe and puffed slowly.

"So, Silk," he finished, "the Black Bat is moving in. Call Butch and Carol. Have them come over immediately after dinner."

CHAPTER III
The Black Bat Moves In

SILK disappeared to make his phone calls and Quinn glanced at a newspaper lying on the table beside him. Any casual observer would never have believed he was reading from the staring, blind appearance of his eyes. But Quinn was reading, attracted by an article about the death of Russ Bowman.

When Silk returned, Quinn said:

"Russ Bowman, one of the biggest racketeers during Prohibition, has just committed suicide, Silk. At least the medical examiner and the police call it suicide—which I don't believe. You must remember Bowman—honest in his way, for he furnished good liquor to his customers, believing the people did not want Prohibition."

"But the M.E.—" Silk began.

"He's wrong now and then. Besides, I happen to have certain information he didn't have. Fifteen days ago, Russ Bowman who had held on to his money and was a wealthy man, bought a business at a high figure. He had no reason to kill himself. I've an idea he was murdered."

Silk shrugged. "Let the cops worry about him. We'll have our hands full with the Black Market."

"That's where Russ Bowman comes in," Quinn said. "Recall the organization for smuggling booze those old bootleggers had? Think how clever they were and the ideas they thought up. Why, they would make the greatest Black Market operators in the world."

Silk whistled softly. "Maybe Bowman wouldn't have anything to do with those rats, so they knocked him off."

"Exactly," Quinn nodded. "Give the devil his due. Bowman was no angel, but I knew him well enough to be sure he'd never have anything to do with a treasonable affair like the Black Market. Perhaps he was approached with an offer to join. He would have been a valuable man. He refused—now he's in the morgue. Well, I'll see if Carol and Butch have arrived."

Quinn walked over to the bookshelves that lined one wall, opened a door by means of a hidden control and held out both hands toward Carol. Over her shoulder he grinned at Butch.

Quinn and Carol sat down on a couch while Butch.straddled a chair. Silk remained near the hidden door in case anyone rang the bell or there was a phone call.

"I hope something's on the fire, boss," Butch said. "Ever since they turned me down for the Army and all the other services, I been feeling like a heel. A heel likes to kick somebody's teeth out and I'm looking for a guy with nice, shiny molars."

"Cheer up, Butch. You'll probably find opportunity. Listen, both of you. We're going into action against a Black Market which seems to be developing fast, and my work on the rationing board will help a lot. First, we need a lead. That's where you come in, Butch."

"Oh, boy," Butch commented hopefully. "Where do I start?"

"There's a grocery store on the corner of Market and Wood Streets. Several complaints have been received concerning its activities. Go there and see if you can buy some groceries without a ration book. Try for coffee especially. If you draw any results, contract to buy a lot of it. Two hundred pounds. say, and indicate you can use a lot more."

"Like I was going to sell it myself?" Butch said.

"Exactly. I'll give, you a roll of bills to flash, Then name Acme Brand coffee which is hard to get, because it's blended with Java. Say you need it *fast. If the deal is closed, watch the Acme Coffee* Company's warehouse and see what develops."

QUINN handed over a fat wad of bills, and advised Butch to switch to more flashy clothes. Butch grinned and disappeared into the tunnel.

Then Quinn turned to Carol, trim and neat in a dark blue tailored suit. Long ago Quinn had realized that if he had derived nothing else from recovering his sight, meeting her was enough.

"I have a nice little assignment for you too, darling," he said to her. "There's a gasoline filling station next door to the Elemander Garage. I've heard they sell more gas than the amount allowed them. Try to buy some gasoline without coupons and see what happens. Report back here as soon as possible."

"I'll smile my prettiest," Carol promised.

"Don't do that," Quinn warned. "You might find yourself owning the station. Be sure your tank is almost empty. I want to test the gas they sell. Maybe we can trace it that way."

Carol also vanished via the tunnel,

"And I," Silk said ruefully, "as usual, stay home. I'd like to be in this, sir. Anybody dealing in Black Market stuff is worse than any big-shot gangster."

Quinn picked up his cane and the mask of blindness came over his eyes once more. He walked toward the secret door.

"Before this is over," he remarked, "both of us may find we've had all the excitement we want for some time to come. I've a hunch this organization will be tightly controlled by someone with an 'in'. The members will be carefully picked and they'll guard their racket like the gold-mine it is. How about some dinner, Silk? Issuing ration tickets half the day makes a man hungry."

While Tony Quinn sat down to one of Silk's savory, but economical meals, Butch was in full action. Wearing checked suit, a gaudy hat and a necktie which was a riot of colors, he swaggered into the grocery store. Only one man was on duty. He wore a dirty apron and a smirk that was supposed to be a warm smile of welcome.

"Coffee," Butch said.

"You have a rationing book?" the grocer asked cagily.

"Sure. You can't buy coffee without one, can you? Give me a pound of the Acme Brand. I always drink it."

"But you can't buy any," the grocer answered promptly. "Not without proper connections."

Butch leaned across the counter and spoke in a confidential whisper.

"The fact is, pal, I'm a commission agent. A certain ritzy club has always used the brand, but *they can't seem to get any. Now I'd pay just twice* the retail cost for a few cases."

"Beat it," the grocer snapped. "Hotels, restaurants and clubs can get all the coffee they want."

Butch grinned broadly. "So I'm told, but how about the members? I might go even higher than twice the price of it for quantity. I'll even pay for it right now and to show I'm on the up-and-up, you deliver it to me at my house."

"Walk into the back room," the grocer said. "Here comes a customer."

Five minutes later, the grocer ran through a telephone book.

"Your name is McGrath, huh? Yeah, there's a McGrath at the address you gave me. Okay—I'll try to get two hundred pounds for you. How much can you use?"

"Every pound I can lay my hands on," Butch said promptly, and brought out the roll of bill. He peeled off some of them, and handed them over.

"I'll expect delivery tomorrow," he warned. "Okay?"

"If it can be had, you'll have it," the grocer promised. "And say—it wouldn't be too healthy to say much about where it came from."

"A guy never dries up his own oil well." Butch chuckled. "So long—oil well."

BUTCH made certain he wasn't followed, and headed across town to the waterfront, where there were many warehouses. He took up a vigil overlooking the Acme plant. He didn't know what to

expect next, but knew that the Black Bat had selected this particular brand of coffee with some definite purpose in mind.

Two hours later, Butch drifted into an all-night lunchroom from which he could still maintain his vigil. He ordered coffee and pie and finally got the counterman into conversation.

"This Java gets weaker by the day," he grumbled. "Sometimes rationing is a pain in the neck."

"Ha!" the counterman grunted. "You should be in the restaurant business. I know the coffee's not so hot, but what can a guy do? I used to use nothing but Acme. Bought it right from the roasters across the street, but Acme sells only to the government these days. Not a pound goes any place else, so I do the best I can."

Butch grinned. "Be pretty swell, wouldn't it, if one of the Acme trucks turned over and spilled half a ton right on your doorstep?"

The counterman laughed. "Fat chance. Their trucks start rolling right after midnight on the way to some secret millitary spot. They won't crash."

When Butch reached the street, he slipped around to the back of the warehouse and sniffed appreciatively of the aroma of roasting coffee. Only one truck was backed up to the platform—a huge trailer affair. Men were wheeling case after case of coffee into it while a young fellow wearing a cap watched them. He closed the doors when the truck was full, climbed into the cab and started the motor. That was Butch's chance. For just before the doors of the trailer-truck were closed, Butch had managed to squeeze his bulk inside it. He was playing a hunch, but if the Black Market operators were going to get themselves a load of Acme coffee tonight, this was their one chance. Also Butch might find himself in the middle of a mess.

He grinned gleefully.

The truck rolled out of the city and headed north. Butch settled down to wait.

It was a full hour later when the truck suddenly pulled off the road and the motor was shut off. Butch instantly slipped out of the back, closed the doors softly and faded into the darkness of the lonesome highway. Perhaps the driver only wanted a smoke or a nap. Butch watched from behind a clump of bushes.

The driver got out, stretched his legs and smoked six cigarettes chain fashion. Finally, a car slowed and blinked its headlights twice. The driver started waving his hands.

The car slid to a stop and two men got out and started talking to the driver. Butch saw money passed to the driver, then one of the men took ropes from his pocket and tied up the unresisting man.

They carried him to the side of the road and

laid him down on the grass. One man drew a gun, reversed it and raised it.

"It won't hurt much, buddy," he assured, "and a crack on the dome pays off, huh? Two grand ain't so bad. Good night, pal."

THE gun butt cracked down!

One of the men hurried to the truck cab and got in. The other climbed back into the car and both vehicles rolled away. Butch sprang from his hiding place and squatted beside the unconscious truck driver.

He waited impatiently.

"Hey, buddy," Butch said, as the man recovered his wits, "you were socked too quick. We made a mistake in the amount of dough we handed you. It was supposed to be one grand, not two."

The driver groaned and tried to sit up. "The deal was for two grand," he complained shrilly. "I ... Hey, you're not one of the men who..."

"I'm not a cop either," Butch said. "Just a plain guy who wants to set you right. Listen, those monkeys would toss you to the scavengers for two cents. How did a nice kid like you get mixed up with them?"

The truck driver bit his lip and remained silent. Butch straightened. He rose and took a few steps.

"Okay, have it your way. I hate to turn a guy over to the cops, but stubborn people ain't in my line. I'll hail a car—"

"You mean you won't turn me in if I talk?" the driver asked. "What's your angle anyhow?"

"Suppose I just don't like the monkeys who got you into this mess. Suppose I'm the opposition. It would pay you to hook up with a guy like me. Who were those gorillas?"

"I don't know," the driver groaned. "I—I got into a mess. Gambled everything I owned and could borrow. Then a man told me how to get even. The two thousand pays everything off. I don't want to stay mixed-up with any rackets like this. Not with you or anybody else!"

"All right," Butch soothed him. "All I want is information. Now just where was this gamhling place?"

The driver started to speak.

CHAPTER IV
The Big Squeeze

BEFORE Butch could get an answer to his question, he heard the faint whine of a motor, glanced over his shoulder and promptly threw himself flat. A car rolled to a stop, the rear door opened and a flashlight beam parted the darkness. It swept across the truck drivcr, straining at his bonds. It left him and centered on Butch.

Butch was up in a flash and running wildly. He heard the crack of a gun, the shriek from the truck driver which was silenced by another bullet, then a chunk of lead whined past his head.

Butch threw up both hands and fell on his face. It was a realistic drop.

The car pulled away. Butch got to his feet and ran back toward the road. The rear license plate was illuminated enough so be could file the numbers away in his mind, then he hurried to the truck driver. Butch grimaced, knowing the man would never talk now. He had been hit squarely through the head.

A slow rage took possession of Butch. He searched the dead man, found the money and a wallet giving his address and showing the picture of an elderly couple, probahly the driver's father and mother. Butch noted the address, replaced the wallet and shoved the two thousand dollars into his pocket.

Then he moved out toward the road, wary of passenger cars that whined toward him. Those killers might be back.

A milk truck picked him up finally and when Butch reached the city, he made his way back to Tony Quinn's laboratory. There he touched a button which caused a light to glow briefly in Silk's room.

In moments, Tony Quinn was in the laboratory listening to Butch's grim report.

"I put that two grand into an envelope," Butch said, "and mailed it to the driver's people. That's the least I could do."

"Good," Quinn said. "So these bandits send men along after the crime is committed to check on things. You were lucky, Butch. The ease with which you contracted for the coffee indicates they'll go to any extreme so long as money is involved. It smacks more and more of the old bootleggers."

"Well anyhow"—Butch grinned—"a friend of yours is going to get some coffee tomorrow. I sent the two hundred pounds to Captain McGrath."

Quinn laughed. McGrath would get a headache trying to figure it out.

"The car registration number you got may help," he told Butch. "At any rate, we'll put that grocer out of business. You did well, Butch."

"How'd Carol make out?" Butch asked. "She could have purchased enough Black Market gasoline to run a twenty ton truck from here to the Coast and back. It's pretty rotten gas too—diluted with some agent. Black Market dealers don't mind if their customers squawk."

Tony Quinn went over to a steel locker and took out the regalia of the Black Bat. He rejected the cape as too cumbersome for the job he had in mind, but stowed a hood into his pocket, as well as a gun and a set of keys. He slipped out of a tweed smoking jacket and donned a jet black coat. He already wore black trousers and shoes.

"As soon as I check the numbers of that murder car, I'll pay its owner a visit," he said. "And we might as well check right now."

He picked up a phone, called the Motor Vehicle Department and gave Captain McGrath's name. The car was promptly identified.

Quinn hung up with a frown, "The car is owned by a chap named Sidney Carew. I know of him—a typical playboy who slipped out of the draft somehow. I think Mr. Carew will have a few things to explain. Want to drive me to his house, Butch?"

"You bet!" Butch said.

TONY QUINN put on a wide-brimmed black hat which concealed his features well and shadowed those scars around his eyes, then joined Butch who waited in the cheap-looking coupé outside the estate.

"I've a feeling," the Black Bat said, emphatically, as Butch drove off, "that we'll find all our old friends of bootlegging days on the go once more and they'll be as dangerous as ever. Drop me as close to the service entrance of Carew's apartment house as possible, park down the street and conceal yourself in a doorway. Be ready for action."

"I have been ready," Butch said ominously, "ever since I heard those slugs smash into the truck driver's body. They never gave him a chance, and they don't deserve one."

The Black Bat slipped out of the slowly moving car along a quiet street, reached the service entrance and disappeared inside the building. He searched the janitor's quarters and found a list of tenants. From this, he determined the location of Carew's apartment.

As he climbed five flights of steps, he removed his hat and tucked it under his coat. Then he donned the hood, and the eyes through the slits in the hood were hard and cold. He stepped up to the entrance of Carew's apartment and listened.

His acute hearing detected no sound so he tried his keys. The fourth one turned the tumblers and he opened the door a crack. The apartment was dark, yet he could see everything in the place that was furnished lavishly, considering that the occupant had no apparent income. The Black Bat stepped in, closed the door and sat down.

In the hour that passed, he concentrated on men who had once made fortunes selling illicit liquor—and spent fortunes as fast as they made them. All but Russ Bowman. More and more, the Black Bat reasoned that Bowman had been murdered and the only reason he could assign was Bowman's refusal to join other bootleggers in Black Market dealings.

He knew also that if any number of such ex-racketeers were banded together, someone directed every move they made with a strong hand. That strong hand was what the Black Bat sought. Break the leader and the others would run like rats. They always had, and the years could never have changed them.

Then he heard footsteps outside—at least two men approaching. The Black Bat moved quietly toward the door, put his back against the wall, to be hidden when the door opened. His gun was ready for instant action.

Sidney Carew stepped in, turned around and faced the man in the outer hallway. Carew had a weak chin and watery eyes, but he wore evening clothes well and had polished manners. Now something had angered him.

"That was a heck of a thing to do," he said curtly. "What if somebody saw my car there? What if both those men aren't dead, and they got the numbers? What'll that make me?"

"A corpse, if you don't stop being so jittery," the man outside answered. "Those two guys are dead. I never miss, Carew. Now stop worrying. Everything is okay."

"And see that I get paid as usual," Carew said. "Good night."

He slammed the door, turned on the light switch—and froze. A black-hooded man stood beside him, and a gun was poked into Carew's ribs.

"Wh-what do you want?" Carew managed faintly. "I—I haven't any money. Not much anyway."

"Just walk over and sit down," the Black Bat said. "I don't want money. Men like you, Carew, may have heard of me, but I rarely come in contact with your type. I'm the Black Bat."

CAREW sat down, and mingled terror and hopelessness were expressed in his face, The Black Bat stood before him, his back toward the closed front door.

"What's your position in this racket, Carew?" he asked bluntly. "Don't stall. I heard enough to know the truth. I also know your car was involved in a murder tonight. You can be classed as an accessory."

"But I didn't know anything about it," Carew

mumbled, "they just took my car. They didn't ask me for the use of it."

"And would you mind telling me how you rate the privilege of running an automobile these days?"

"They—think I work in a war factory. I—I got a job there to get a C card.... Look! You've got to believe me I had nothing to do with the murders."

"And just how are you involved?" the Black Bat asked.

"You mean the Black Market? I needed money. Those fellows got me into a trap. I had to obey them. I—I'm supposed to find people who will buy rationed stuff in big lots. I work on a c ommission."

"For whom?"

"I don't know. That's the truth. Different men contact me, and I give them the dope. Get me out of this, Black Bat! Get me out and I'll tell everything I know, it isn't much, but it may help."

"For instance?" the Black Bat urged.

"You've got to put me in a safe place first. They'll kill me if they even suspect. Listen—this much I will say. I like to gamble. One night I lost too much and paid off with a rubber check. They gave me a choice of being tossed into jail or helping them out. I think the game was framed, though. Tyler never—"

Carew stopped talking suddenly terrified. The Black Bat glanced up. Directly across from him was a mirror. It reflected the whole side of the room and anyone standing in the doorway would have had an excellent view of the Black Bat hiding behind the partly open door.

In the mirror now, the Black Bat saw the door opening. Carew's companion was back. The man's gun came up quickly. There was a shot and Carew screamed. The Black Bat's gun exploded. The man in the doorway stopped abruptly, leaned against the wall and slowly slid to the floor.

Carew was dead. The killer who had bragged about being such a good shot had not exaggerated.

The dead killer was unknown to the Black Bat and there was no time to search him. The Black Bat reached into his own pocket, took out a small metal container and opened it. Several small black stickers, shaped like a bat in full flight, were inside. He pasted one of these on the forehead of the dead crook. It branded that man as the victim of the Black Bat and it would also instill a certain amount of fear into whoever had sent this murderer.

But when he was in the car with Butch, being driven rapidly away, Butch had never seen the Black Bat look more grim.

CHAPTER V
Gwendolyn

CAPTAIN McGRATH of the Detective Bureau bustled importantly into the apartment of the late Sidney Carew. McGrath's temper was raw-edged already and when he saw the black bat sticker on the forehead of the dead man in the corridor, he turned a beefy red.

"I had a hunch I'd find the Black Bat was mixed up in this," he growled. "Especially after what happened to me just now."

"What happened, Captain?" a quiet voice asked.

McGrath turned, half angrily, then brought his hand up in a respectful salute to Police Commissioner Warner.

Warner was an iron-gray-haired man of sixty, who looked about forty. He was slim, efficient, and alert. McGrath seemed just as alert, but there the comparison stopped. McGrath was shorter, stouter, wore a closely cropped mustache, and was inclined toward baldness. He wore a derby hat and dark clothes.

Commissioner Warner led McGrath away from the others. He spoke in a confidential whisper.

"Maybe you wonder how come I got here so fast. I was awake when the phone rang. I thought I heard somebody snooping around my place, so I went down to have a look. There was a package on the front porch. It contained more doggone coffee than you ever saw in your life. Must have been two hundred pounds of it."

"You should be ashamed of yourself," Warner said.

"Good gosh, sir, I never ordered the coffee. I think the Black Bat sent it to make a monkey out of me. He always plays tricks like that."

"And where would the Black Bat get two hundred pounds of coffee?" Warner asked.

"I don't know, sir. Leave it to him though. He's a smooth crook, even if some people do say he is on the level.... I suppose I'd better send it over to Headquarters! Gosh—two hundred pounds! Acme Brand too. The best money can buy."

"Acme?" Warner ceased smiling over McGrath's discomfiture. "Captain, earlier tonight an Acme truck was hijacked, several tons of coffee stolen and the driver tied up, then shot to death. I think you'd better bring yourself to Headquarters along with the coffee."

McGrath turned crimson. "Commissioner, I don't know a thing about that coffee! Like I said, the Black Bat must have done it. Now he's been here and murdered a man—"

"Think again or look again," Warner said. "The man in the chair is Sidney Carew, who leased this apartment. The man in the hall is a crook. A bullet from that crook's gun killed Carew, and I imagine a bullet from the Black Bat's gun killed the crook. Which means the Black Bat fired in self-defense, then branded his work so no one else would be accused."

McGrath walked over and looked down at the dead crook.

"It's one of Lee Tyler's boys—a gambler," he announced. "You suppose Tyler has gone crooked after all these years? Even the D.A. has to admit his gambling places are strictly on the level."

"Gamblers are criminals," Warner said. "Tyler is no exception. Better get him downtown when you finish up here. And Captain—don't do anything rash about the Black Bat. You've no evidence he is responsible for leaving that coffee at your house."

McGrath pointed at the black sticker on the dead crook's forehead.

"I've evidence he did that, sir. I also have a pretty neat way cooked up to land him this time. At least, I'll slow him down."

WARNER looked around to be certain no one else was within earshot.

"Captain, I know you believe that Tony Quinn is the Black Bat. I don't, but that doesn't make any difference so far as you are concerned. However, I warn you, some day Quinn's patience will suddenly come to an end and if he makes things hot for you, it's on your own head. Use discretion in handling him."

"Yes, sir," McGrath nodded. "When I prove he's the Black Bat, I'll have enough on him to make it stick."

McGrath didn't finish with the investigation until nearly dawn. He drove home, put the car away and entered his house. Closing the door quietly, he moved to a clothes rack, draped a black, ribbed cape over his shoulders and proceeded to search the rooms on the lower floor.

As he stepped into the kitchen, a low growl warned him. McGrath grinned, fluffed the cape out and moved forward.

At first, it seemed as if a pony was rising from beside the stove. However, the animal turned out to be a cross between a Great Dane and a mastiff. The huge dog took one look at the cape and charged.

McGrath tried to scamper out of the way, tripped on the cape and fell with a thud that shook every dish in the kitchen and brought his wife out of bed with a half-smothered yell of fear. The big dog grabbed the cape and proceeded to shake it.

The dog also shook McGrath until his teeth chattered. He managed to get the cape off and reached out a hand toward the dog. It dropped the cape instantly, placed two elephantine feet on McGrath's chest and licked his face with vigor.

McGrath finally rolled out from under and got to his feet. He mopped his face with a handkerchief.

"Gwendolyn," he said, "for a big slob, you've got brains."

"Were you referring to yourself in that last statement?" a woman's voice asked ironically.

McGrath flushed, and faced his wife. "Now see here, Mary, I know what I'm doing."

"Sometimes I wonder," she replied. "When will you get that horse out of here? Don't you realize we're on rations and she eats ten times as much as we do? Also, just what do you intend doing with her?"

McGrath's enthusiasm came to the forefront. "I'll tell you, but keep it quiet. You know how badly I want the Black Bat. You also know I think Tony Quinn is not blind and may be the Black Bat. Well, I'm going to present Tony Quinn with this dog. Just a gesture of good will. Blind people need dogs to lead them."

"Seeing Eye dogs, especially trained," Mrs. McGrath said. "But all this cow does is just eat and eat. If he led Mr. Quinn anywhere, it would be to the nearest butcher shop. Mac, I think this Black Bat has finally driven you out of your mind."

"He killed another man tonight."

Mrs. McGrath sighed and sat down.

"Mac, you're a stubborn old fool. The Black Bat helps you just as he helps all other officers of the law. He fights criminals the same as you do—and a lot more successfully. Yet you want to arrest him. Now just how is this dog going to help?"

McGRATH picked up the cape and the dog growled ominously. McGrath hastily dropped the cape.

"I've been training her," he explained. "Any time that Quinn puts on the cape the Black Bat uses, Gwendolyn will knock him down and rip it off. She hates capes. Now suppose Quinn goes out on a job as the Black Bat. Sometime or other Gwendolyn will follow him. Imagine what will happen. Gwendolyn doesn't care who wears the cape. She just hates capes and she'll eat up any one she sees. If I'm around—and I'll try to be—the Black Bat will be pinned down by Gwendolyn and I'll have him. It can't fail."

Mrs. McGrath closed both eyes in resignation. "Mac, the only thing that has failed is your brain. If you ask me, it's a dirty trick to play on Mr.

Quinn even if he should be the Black Bat. And I don't think for one minute he is."

McGrath patted the huge dog. "Gwen, old girl, you're now sworn in as an officer of the law and your assignment is to knock down the Black Bat and hold him down."

Gwendolyn stood on her hind legs, put both forepaws on McGrath's shoulders and started that tongue going again. McGrath staggered a step or two, then slowly folded up under the weight of the beast....

While Captain McGrath had been carrying on a rather unpromising investigation into the death of Sidney Carew and the murderer whom the Black Bat shot, the Black Bat had been utilizing every possible moment before dawn.

As Butch drove him away, the Black Bat said:

"Close one in there, Butch. I slipped just a trifle by not checking my surroundings. A killer saw my reflection in a mirror and came back to take care of matters. The unfortunate part of it was that Carew seemed just about ready to talk."

"Didn't he tell you a thing?" Butch asked.

"Yes, something rather significant. That truck driver who was murdered mentioned to you that he'd been forced to help hijack his own truck because gamblers had cleaned him out."

Butch nodded. "They took him for two thousand dollars, then he was offered the same amount to pay off his gambling debts if he'd let them take his truck. Maybe the gamblers just loaned the dough and made that kid a criminal. Some racket. How can they lose?"

"They will lose," the Black Bat commented dryly. "Well anyway, Carew mentioned that he had also become involved in gambling losses and was being compelled to feel out certain individuals to try and sell Black Market goods."

"If we knew who those gamblers were, we could smack 'em," Butch said ominously.

"Carew mentioned the name of Tyler," the Bat said. "He's been running gambling places all over town for years. Big stuff only, luxurious surroundings, refreshments and a general air of respectability. Furthermore, Tyler has a reputation for running his games honestly."

The Black Bat glanced at his wristwatch.

"Take the next left, Butch. We're not going home yet. I'm going to have a look at one of Tyler's biggest establishments. The one he supervises himself. If nothing develops there, I'll go to his home."

Forty minutes later, the Black Bat and Butch saw Tyler come down the steps of a brownstone front, apparently a private dwelling. The gambler was inclined to obesity, but an expensive tailor had camouflaged that rather expertly. Tyler wore a tuxedo, a black topcoat and a black hat with a rakish set.

BUTCH was parked half a block away. The Black Bat opened the car door and pulled down the brim of his hat.

"I'm going to trail him a bit," he told Butch. "One thing, Butch, with this gasoline shortage, people you want to follow don't pop into cars and drive off."

Walking down the street, well concealed by the shadows of the dim-out, the Black Bat watched Tyler hurry away. The man was obviously nervous, for he looked behind him often and slowed up before he reached the darkest areas and dipped a hand into his side coat pocket.

The dimmed-out street meant nothing to the Black Bat. Even the fact that Tyler was dressed almost entirely in black didn't bother him, with his strange sight.

Tyler stopped suddenly, as if he played a hunch that he was being followed. The man was acting in a decidedly suspicious manner. On the move again, Tyler stepped up to a parcel post mailbox. Once more he peered around, then drew something from an inner pocket, hastily thrust it into the mailbox and hurried off.

Before the Black Bat proceeded any distance after the man, two shadowy forms slipped from a doorway. Both approached that mailbox so the Black Bat let Tyler go and concentrated upon these two men. They were after whatever Tyler had posted.

Surprisingly, one of them had a key that opened the mailbox. He dipped through the articles inside and finally took out one slim package. He thrust this into his pocket, closed and locked the box, then both men moved straight toward where the Black Bat stood watching them.

It was an advantage he couldn't afford to miss. Perhaps whatever Tyler had placed in that mailbox would have something to do with the Black Market—if the man was involved at all.

CHAPTER VI
Patriotic Gambler

THE Black Bat waited until both men were fairly close. Then he tensed to leap out at them. Something happened though. One thrust a cigarette between his lips, lit a match and held it to the smoke. The other just happened to glance up and the match threw enough light to reveal the Black Bat.

The man muttered something and both whirled to run for it. The Black Bat sprinted after them.

He could outrun them easily, so long as no patrolman cars or pedestrians appeared. For ths Black Bat knew he would be in danger then of being recognized, since he was not wearing his hood.

One of the fleeing men saw the Black Bat gaining on him. He drew a gun and fired, but the bullet missed. The second man fired, too, but both men were too excited to exhibit decent marksmanship.

The Black Bat had his own gun out. He had started to bring it down when he heard a window being raised noisily, then another.

With a muttered imprecation, the Black Bat started running as fast as he could back to where Butch waited. Butch also had heard the shots and had the coupé rolling slowly, close to the curb. When he caught a glimpse of the Black Bat, he stepped on it.

The car door opened and the Black Bat gave a flying leap into the car. Butch gave her the gun as the Black Bat panted for breath.

"Tyler is up to something," he said then.

"No man with a clean conscience acts as he did. Perhaps he heads this Black Market, but refuses to contact any of his men directly—just leave instructions in a mailbox at an hour when he knows no collections will be made. His men are provided with a key, retrieve the orders and are careful not to touch anything else. It's pretty slick, Butch. If Tyler is the man we're after, it won't be any cinch to pin him down."

"A bust right on the snoot would help," Butch opined. "Where to now, Boss?"

"Tyler's home. If you hurry, we can beat him there. Next left, Butch, and don't go too fast. Cops in the prowl cars are pretty suspicious of any passenger car out these days."

Butch made the corner.

"What'll I do if they take my marker numbers and I'm called up before some rationing board?" he asked.

The Black Bat chuckled. "You live within the area covered by the board I head. If your number comes in, I'll see that it is deleted. That's not exactly in accordance with my oath of office, but we're trying to help rationing, not harm it."

Butch slid to the curb a block from Tyler's home. The residence was almost as big as Tony Quinn's and shrouded in complete darkness at the moment.

"We beat him, all right." The Black Bat adjusted his hood. "You get out of the car in case an officer comes along and wants to know why you're using up gasoline at this hour of the morning."

The Black Bat faded into the darkness around Tyler's house. Before long the gambler sauntered down the street, no longer in a hurry. Getting rid of that package had put him at ease.

He walked up on the front porch, put a key into the front door lock—then froze. He let go of the key and slowly raised both hands high.

"You're making a bad mistake, my friend," he said, without turning around. "I don't carry much money around with me. Not these days. There is a hundred dollars in my wallet. Left trouser pocket. Help yourself."

A QUIET laugh startled him even more than the pressure of the gun. He turned around. Whatever Tyler was, he was no coward. He peered at the hooded figure standing before him—and let his arms drop.

"The Black Bat! Have you taken to running down gamblers these days?"

"If I ever do," the Black Bat chuckled, "you'll be the last on my list, Tyler. I'll go after the crooked ones first. No, I'm here for some information, Shall we go inside?"

"You don't need the gun, Black Bat," Tyler said, "Whatever is up, I'm on your side!"

The Black Bat stuffed his gun into a holster.

"Rather a nice place you have here," he commented, as he entered the home with Tyler.

"How can you tell?" Tyler asked. "Before I've turned on any lights?"

"Excellent statue there, Mr. Tyler. Rodin, isn't it?"

Tyler's hand rested on the light switch, but did not move it.

"I can't understand how you know that, Black Bat. I can't see the statue myself and I know just where it is. Perhaps you are someone who has been a guest here?"

"Turn on the lights, Tyler," the Black Bat said. "I've never been in the house before in my life. Sit down, please. I have two or three questions to ask, and honest answers will be simple."

Tyler sighed, still wondering how this weird man could see things in complete darkness. He lighted a cigarette and looked up at the hooded crime-fighter with a half-mocking grin.

"It's peculiar," he said, "but I'm not at all afraid of you. Yet I have heard people's teeth chatter when your name is mentioned. Perhaps it's my easy conscience."

"Or your gambler's nerves." The Black Bat laughed. "Tyler, not so long ago two men were murdered. One of them was a young man who drove a truck for the Acme Coffee Company. It seems he lost two thousand dollars in gambling and was compelled to help crooks hijack his truck in order to get enough money to pay back his debt. His name was Owen. Ever hear of him?"

Tyler shrugged. "You probably know I run several places. They differ only in the type of people catered to. Every game is honest. Percentages take care of me. Sorry—I don't know Owen."

"Then perhaps this name will mean something to you, Sidney Carew!"

Tyler's cigarette almost fell out of his mouth. For a moment he said nothing.

"Is—Carew dead?" he asked then.

"As dead as a bullet through the head will ever make him," the Black Bat replied. "Carew was also in debt to some gambler and I knew he frequented your places, because he mentioned your name before he died,"

"I didn't kill him," Tyler said quickly. "Is there any danger of the police finding out about what Carew said?"

"I'm the only one—alive—who heard him talk," the Black Bat answered. "Was he in debt to you?"

"He was. Carew hung around my place—the big one—until I got sick of him. He kept pestering my clients and sometimes I had complaints about him. He was so hard up he tried to sell rationed goods without taking any tickets in trade. I called him into my office, told him to keep away from my places and issued an order for Carew to be blacklisted. But I didn't kill him."

THE hooded head of Tyler's visitor moved slowly up and down.

"Carew didn't accuse you. I came here to set myself straight, Tyler. If you are not connected with any Black Market activities, there's nothing to worry about. If you are—so help me, I'll break you."

Tyler jumped up. "Come over here, Black Bat, I want to show you something."

Tyler headed for the fireplace, moved aside a panel and exposed the shining surface of a wall safe. He opened this and drew out a fat wad of bonds, War Bonds, in high denominations.

"I'm putting every nickel I own into them," Tyler said. "Would I be doing that if I played a Black Market routine? Men who do that are traitors. They deserve the same sort of fate a spy gets. Black Bat, if anyone but you made this accusation, I'd start fighting."

"Put them back," the Black Bat said. "Tyler, you're a surprise to me." Tyler grinned. "It might surprise you to know how much I enjoy taking money away from people who would rather gamble than buy bonds with their money."

The Black Bat made no mention of Tyler's mysterious actions at the mailbox as he turned toward the door.

"Well, I'll be going," he said. "But perhaps I'll be back. You may be able to help me."

Tyler held out his hand.

"Here's my hand on it, if I can."

The Black Bat took the proffered hand, then Tyler walked over to a chair to sit down again. Suddenly, the lights went out. The gambler heard a door close—and the Black Bat was gone.

Outside, the Black Bat quickly made his way to the rear of Tyler's home. He was not at all sure of the man. True, Tyler had been buying bonds, but they were a good investment, and buying them might be just the sort of gesture the man behind the Black Market might make.

The Black Bat wanted to look around. A Black Market meant there must be some place where tons of supplies could be hidden. It would have to be a cleverly camouflaged place, too.

He caught a glimpse of a two-story garage set well back, and decided to have a look. He was twenty yards from the garage when he heard a slight sound behind him that only his acute ears could detect. Someone was stalking him.

Then he heard more noises, There were at least three of them, and he was covered from three sides. The only avenue open was straight toward the big garage.

He caught a glimpse of one man and saw the gun in his hand. They meant business and a firm doubt of Tyler entered the Black Bat's mind. Tyler might have signaled for help, and if he kept three gunmen on the premises, they were not there as ornaments.

The gunmen couldn't see him. He was certain of that or they'd have hailed him. It was certain no shooting would be done unless necessary, especially If these were Tyler's men because the gambler would not want to attract the police.

A fairly tall hedge was set in front of the garage and bordering the cement ramp that led into it. The Black Bat darted behind this hedge, peered through parted branches and saw all three of the men. They knew his only haven was the garage.

The Black Bat, crouched, moved silently toward a small door in the garage and slipped inside. His penetrating eyes saw three expensive cars. Two were on blocks.

A STAIRWAY led to the second floor, and he went up quickly. He stepped into what seemed a sort of game room above the garage, made his way to a small window and peered out.

One man was watching the garage door, while the other two fanned out to investigate the rear of the building. The Black Bat saw that there wasn't much he could do but battle his way out. Then he hesitated, bent down and picked up several cigarette butts. They were different brands. The

whole floor was littered with them, as though a number of men had met here and smoked incessantly.

Checking more cigarette butts in an effort to roughly determine just how many men had been present, the Black Bat picked up several cards. They all bore the name and address of Russ Bowman.

This then, must have been where Bowman had first realized his fate. Bowman could have deliherately dropped those cards as a weak clue; yet the best one he could leave under the circumstances. The Black Bat gathered up the cards and put them in his pocket.

Another glance out of the windows showed all three hoodlums clustered together in a conference. Noiselessly, then, two of them moved to positions covering each end of the garage, while the third headed for the doors. This man wore a gray coat and a cap and seemed a bit clumsy.

The Black Bat heard the door open downstairs, heard the men fussing with the cars to make sure no one was hidden inside one of them. Then footsteps sounded on the steps.

The Black Bat flattened himself beside the door. A flashlight ray broke the darkness, but the thug did not come through the door. He flashed the light in all directions. Apparently satisfied that no one was hiding there, he stepped through the doorway,

An arm curled around his throat and a hand gripped his gun wrist and turned it until the weapon dropped to the floor. That relentless grip choked him slowly and no amount of kicking or squirming could break it. Also he felt himself lifted so his feet couldn't make any noise.

It must have seemed like the end for him.

CHAPTER VII
Detective's Gift

MOMENTS passed and the thug the Black Bat held grew limp. Easing the fellow to the floor the Bat drew back a fist and knocked the man out.

He removed the gray coat, put it over his own and donned the cap. Swiftly then he ran down the steps, moved out of the garage door and waved one hand in signal that nobody was in the garage.

The two others arose from their hiding places, but the Black Bat kept walking. He rounded the side of the garage, reached a dark spot and began running. A fence loomed up. If his eyes had been ordinary, he would have run headlong against it. Instead he leaped the fence agilely and kept going.

He saw a big house through the darkness. While the thugs he had left behind floundered around trying to find out what had happened, he tiptoed to the front porch of this house and took a look at the nameplate. It was the home of Reginald Archer.

"Where Russ Bowman was last seen," the Black Bat muttered. "I wonder if those men were from this place or from Tyler's?"

Only minutes later, the Black Bat clambered into the coupé and Butch drove him away. He told Butch what happened and the big man grunted in exasperation.

"I would have to be cooling my heels some place else when the party gets rough. So Tyler is a punk, huh?"

"I'm not sure," the Black Bat said. "His garage has been used as a meeting place of some kind and Russ Bowman was there, but a clever bunch of crooks might use it without Tyler's knowledge or permission. These days, Butch, a garage is about as quiet as an abandoned cemetery."

Silk was a pretty worried man when the Black Bat entered the lab through its tunnel.

"Anyway," Silk said as he held a tweed coat for Tony Quinn, "you didn't come back empty-handed, sir. Where did you collect this coat and cap?"

"From a gentleman who parted with them only after I persuaded him with the point of my fist. Let's see what he carries around."

From one pocket Quinn drew out a pair of dice. He rolled them, then put them under a powerful glass.

"Loaded," he said. "Skillfully too. What else is in the pockets, Silk?"

"Cards." Silk gently rested a fingertip over the edge of the cards. "And marked by indentations. Whoever this man was, he was out to grift his way along. Look—here's an empty envelope, but there's an address on it."

Tony Quinn glanced at the envelope and grunted with surprise.

"That man was one of Tyler's professional gamblers, assigned to one of his cheaper houses. Tyler runs games at this addrcss. All of which puts him squarely back into the running. How about breakfast, Silk?"

"Yes, sir, I'll bring some to Butch too. We've plenty, even for an appetite like his."

Butch was goggle-eyed. "You don't happen to have a little steak about two inches thick, Silk? Honest, I'd do anything just to sink my teeth into a steak. Next thing they'll be selling 'em in ritzy jewelry stores."

"Give him one," Quinn chuckled. "Plenty of potatoes too. Sorry that I can't join you, Butch, but Captain Mc.Grath might decide to pay a visit, worrying about me being the Black Bat."

Gwendolyn's tongue slithered across Silk's face as McGrath braced himself and pulled.

Butch grinned: "I'll worry along with just the steak for company. Rare, Silk. Plenty rare."

TONY QUINN took a cold shower to eliminate any traces of fatigue.

He was used to these all-night forays. A shave helped make him more presentable.

He was seated at the breakfast table when he heard a car pull up in front of the house.

"Company, Silk," he said. "It might be McGrath. He should be boiling mad over the dead thug I presented him with last night—to say nothing of two hundred pounds of coffee Butch had delivered to his house. Listen! It is McGrath. I recognize his footsteps, but what's he got with him? It sound like a horse."

Silk heard it and seemed startled. He made certain everything was in order. No newspapers lying so close to Tony Quinn that it could be assumed he'd been reading them. Quinn's eyes grew blank and dead looking. He continued to eat.

Silk walked sedately to the door as the buzzer sounded. He opened it and hastily backed away. McGrath laughed heartily and led the enormous dog into the reception hall.

"Captain, what—what—" Silk asked. McGrath let go of the leash and the dog gave one lumbering jump forward. Two paws landed on Silk's shoulders. He crumpled to the floor with a half-strangled cry and half a notion that McGrath had gone insane.

THE DOG bent a huge bead and promptly licked Silk's face.

"Get him off me, McGrath," Silk yelled. "If he steps on me, he'll crush my ribs. Get—"

Silk didn't say anything more, because that great tongue slithered across his face again. McGrath seized the leash and tugged. Then he braced both feet and pulled, but finally let go.

"No use. I can't—budge him. It's your fault, Silk. Gwendolyn just likes you, that's all."

Silk managed to roll from under the animal and get back on his feet. He jumped behind a chair and held it as a shield. Tony Quinn announced his coming by the tap of his cane. Silk looked wildly in the direction of the dining room door. Then he jumped out and grabbed the dog's leash. Gwendolyn nudged him with her massive head, almost throwing him off balance.

"There is a dog—" Quinn started to say.

"How do you know?" McGrath snapped. "You claim you can't see."

"Good morning, Captain. I know there is a dog present because I hear him panting."

"This dog's a her," McGrath said. "Her name is Gwendolyn. She's a little on the big side, but perfectly harmless and, because I'd like to do something for you, Quinn, I decided to make you a present of her."

"A dog—for me?"

"Yes, I figured a blind man needs a dog. Gwendolyn isn't trained like a Seeing Eye dog, but she's smart. Say, in two weeks she could lead you around better than Silk does."

"Well, thank you," Quinn said, somewhat dazed. "She must be an awfully nice dog. Gwendolyn—come here."

Quinn snapped his fingers. The huge animal lumbered toward him, tail wagging furiously. McGrath jumped out of the way. That tail felt like a horsewhip.

QUINN bent down. The dog stopped and looked up at him with almost human understanding.

"Sir," Silk stepped forward warily—"You don't need a dog to lead you about."

"Aw, Silk is just jealous," McGrath derided. "You'll get to like Gwen. And think of the protection she'll give you."

"I am thinking of that," Quinn patted the dog's head. "I'm grateful, Captain. Astounded, too, because I thought you were my sworn enemy."

"Gosh, no!" McGrath shuffled his feet. "What if I do think you're the Black Bat? What if I do hope to slap you smack into the pokey some day? That doesn't mean we can't be friends."

McGrath offered his hand, but Quinn took no notice of it. His blank eyes were directed toward the dog which stood patiently beside him, tail swishing noisily through the air. McGrath dropped his hand and put on his derby hat.

"I'm glad you like her, Quinn. Silk will, too, You should have seen the way she went for him."

"Right," Silk gasped, still mopping his face. "Shall we—keep her, sir?"

"Of course," Quinn said. "I've been thinking of getting a Seeing Eye dog. Somehow, I feel that Gwendolyn will suit me even better. What a huge head! Is she a thoroughbred, Captain?"

"Well—not exactly. She's part Great Dane, part mastiff and part St. Bernard. But she's a swell mutt. I guess I'll run along now. I hope this shows I mean to be friends. Tell Commissioner Warner, will you?"

McGrath started for the door and Gwendolyn lumbered toward him. McGrath fled. Quinn staggered over to a chair and broke into lusty gales of laughter. The dog stood beside him, resting on his knee.

"Silk," Quinn said. "If she likes you, you'd better keep in her good graces and give her something to eat!"

"Her?" Silk yelled. "Why, she—she'd eat us out of everything in two bites!"

"Nevertheless, feed her," Quinn ordered.

Before long, Gwendolyn romped into the living room, dragging Silk, apparently enjoying his protests. Quinn laughed again. The dog settled down with a steak bone between her teeth. She looked up at Quinn as if for his approval, then those mighty jaws closed with a crunching sound.

Silk shuddered. "I think I know why Captain McGrath presented you with this dog, sir."

"Do you?" Quinn asked. "I've been trying to figure that out. McGrath never does much without a firm motive."

"Yes, sir. Remember, I used up a lot of ration stamps and bought four steaks? Three pounds of chopped meat and half a dozen pork chops? Then there were those potatoes left over, some other vegetables. Then those cans of food we were going to nurse along. Well, sir, they are all inside of Gwendolyn."

Quinn restrained an impulse to roar with laughter. Silk was much too serious.

"But what has McGrath's motive to do with Gwendolyn's appetite, Silk?"

"She's a fifth column, sir. McGrath knows if we feed her, we'll go bankrupt and he probably figures you'll have to turn to crime to get enough money to feed yourself. It's downright sabotage."

"You may have something there!" Quinn howled. "Anyway, I've got to attend a meeting of rationing board chairmen this morning, and I suppose we'll have to take Gwendolyn along. Later, we'll get a dog kennel or something."

"Kennel?" Silk blurted. "A stable would be more like it, sir!"

CHAPTER VIII
An idea for Action

GWENDOLYN trotted happily beside Quinn and Silk as they made their way into one of the large city buildings. Galloped might have been better words, because Gwendolyn had frisky ideas.

At the elevator, an attendant automatically put out a hand to help Tony Quinn. The instant it touched Quinn's arm, Gwendolyn started a low growl from somewhere near her tail and it emerged only when the lift reached the fourth floor. By then, the operator was trying to merge himself with the metal side of the car.

"Gwendolyn realizes her job is to protect me, Silk," Quinn said softly.

"Well then, sir, you're probably well-protected. I'll bet even the Marines would hesitate in tackling Gwen. Here we are, sir!'

Quinn was warmly greeted by everyone in the large room they entered. There were whistles of amazement at Gwendolyn's size, but she sat docilely beside Silk who half-consciously stroked

her head. Two gigantic eyes rolled upward and a tongue whipped up to reward Silk.

The City Chairman made a brief speech, thanking his aides for their assistance. Then he introduced a man named Fred Stevenson.

"Mr. Stevenson," the Chairman said, "is the sole owner of the Stevenson Manufacturing Company, handling a great many war orders. He wants to give us a suggestion he has already put to good use."

Stevenson, about fifty, was as straight as a ramrod, and his white hair oddly contrasted with his thick, black eyebrows. He spoke with the forcefulness of a professional orator and it was easy to see that he usually dominated everything and everyone around him.

"Gentlemen," Stevenson said, "one of your prime reasons for handling rationing is to prevent Black Market activities. We all know how prevalent they are. Patriotic Americans abhor them, but enough others who believe they are patriotic too will trade with Black Market crooks. The moment a thing is rationed, these people feel they must get as much as possible of it without using their coupons."

"The same thing happened during Prohibition," the chairman broke in. "Only this is far more serious."

"Quite right," Stevenson bowed slightly. "Now there are more than five hundred persons working for me at my plant. I discovered some of them complaining about not being able to buy certain rationed products, yet others have caches of these same goods because they paid double for them. So I made a suggestion to my employees."

He smoothed his hair, then went on:

"I installed a metal box in the factory. Employees who know of anyone dealing in Black Market goods were invited to write down the facts and drop them into the box. Everything is done anonymously—and here are the results."

One hand which had remained behind his back came forward, gripping a fairly thick wad of paper.

"Sixty one complaints," he announced triumphantly. "Every one of these must be investigated and if any violation is found, those responsible should be arrested. Think what will happen when all factories and offices adopt my plan!"

Applause greeted him. Tony Quinn's neighbor leaned closer and whispered:

"That would be one grand way of getting even with somebody you don't like. Anonymous complaints—and he's proud of the idea!"

Quinn smiled. "It might work, at that. Certainly, the scheme deserves a chance. Interesting anyway."

STEVENSON began circulating among the board chairmen, smiling. He reached Quinn and offered his hand. When Quinn paid no attention to it, Stevenson flushed a bit, but handed over four of his complaint letters.

"See what you think of these," he suggested.

"Thank you," Quinn answered. "Read them to me, Silk, will you?"

"Read them to you?" Stevenson half sputtered. "Why ... Oh, I see. I'm sorry. I didn't know you were blind. Why, you must be Tony Quinn, the district attorney I used to admire so greatly. I'm delighted, Mr. Quinn."

"So am I," said Quinn. "Especially about your idea. Now these complaints. Whom do they concern?"

"Well, there is a butcher on Monroe Avenue, People try to buy meat at ceiling prices and he has none, yet he has been seen to enter his cooler, come out with choice cuts and sell them to others willing to pay above double the ceiling price."

"But that isn't Black Market," Quinn argued. "The butcher is wrong, but Black Market activities concern the hoarding of a large amount of some rationed staple and selling this in wholesale lots. The men behind it are not in it for penny profits, but for thousands."

Stevenson's face fell. "I hadn't thought of that, But these complaints may lead to the higher-ups, and the store of accumulated goods. What gets me is how they obtain those goods."

"They steal them, forge rationing coupons, buy up before rationing starts," Quinn said. "They work slyly and will be hard to catch. I shall look into my share of the complaints; of course. If anything develops, I'll let you know."

Silk and Gwendolyn led Quinn out of the place after a lecture by a government rationing official. Quinn reached down and grasped Gwendolyn's collar. He thrust the cane under one arm and followed the dog sure-footedly.

In the car Gwendolyn promptly parked herself beside Silk and a little too close to the wheel. Silk ordered her to move over and had his face washed. He put both hands against the animal and shoved. Gwendolyn wagged her tail in mighty pleasure and stayed put.

"Try blasting," Quinn said softly.

Silk gave him a dire glance and drove off, scarcely able to breathe for lack of space. Then Silk looked directly at the huge dog and burst out laughing.

"That's the spirit," Quinn chuckled. "We're stuck with her, so make the best of it. Take me to Sossel's butcher shop on Monroe Avenue. Then we'll go to the office."

"Don't say that word so loudly," Silk reproved. "Didn't you see the way Gwen's ears went up? I think, sir, when we speak of food, we'd better spell the words. Imagine letting her loose in a butcher shop!"

QUINN got out of the car half a block from the store and tapped his way into the shop. The owner, neatly aproned and wearing the inevitable straw hat that butchers adopt, came forward with a broad smile. It faded when Quinn showed him the anonymous letter.

"But I do not understand," Sossel said. "I am an honest man. Sure I have sold some meat without coupons, but only to people who needed it badly. Mrs. Dunham, for instance. She has been very sick."

"Advise her to see her rationing board," Quinn said, "and we'll provide her with all the meat she needs. But this under-the-counter stuff has got to stop, Sossel. The next thing you'll start buying from Black Market salesmen."

"Ha!" Sossel exclaimed, "I would throw them out—like I did one who only week ago comes. He has smoked hams. All I can use for three times the ceiling price. I grabbed for a cleaver and he ran fast, I tell you."

"Nice work," Quinn commented. He tore the anonymous letter into shreds. "For that, I'll do this much for you. And if any more of those salesmen come, don't scare them away. Call an officer. Men like you can help greatly in breaking up these traitor gangs."

"I do it," Sossel declared fervently. "Anytime you wish anything from me—"

"Well"—Quinn stroked his chin—"there is something. Have you any bones? For my dog, She has a terrific appetite and munches bones by the gross."

Quinn was given a large bag of meat scraps and bones and returned to the car. As the door opened, Gwendolyn's nose began to bob up and down. She gave one bark that made the windows rattle and transferred herself to the rear seat—and Quinn's lap—by the simple expedient of using Silk as a jumping-off point.

Quinn slid off the seat onto the flonr. Gwendolyn seized a huge joint bone. It crackled like a machine-gun.

"Are you hurt, sir?" Silk managed finally.

Quinn hauled himself up. "No, I think not, but Gwen certainly needs to go on a diet. I wonder how much she does weigh."

"I clocked her on the bathroom scale," Silk said dismally. "It only goes up to two hundred pounds, I—I'm afraid she broke it, sir."

"I ought to break McGrath's neck," Quinn groaned. "DrIve me to the rationing office before Gwendolyn deprives a few thousand citizens of their rationing boss."

CHAPTER IX
Gwendolyn's Little Secret

AFTER dinner, Tony Quinn sat before his fireplace smoking a fragrant pipe. At his, feet lay Gwendolyn, docile and supremely happy. Her snores sounded like miniature earthquakes.

Silk fussed around, finally drew the shades tight and gave Quinn a significant nod. Quinn's blank eyes changed and became alive. He arose, thrust his cane under one arm and started toward the secret door to the lab. He hesitated, turned and grinned at Silk.

"We might as well introduce Butch and Carol to the latest addition to our family. Come on Gwendolyn."

Gwendolyn raised her head, blinked sleepily, but came promptly at Quinn's command. So did the ash tray, a magazine rack, one large lamp and a chair.

Quinn opened the door and Gwendolyn thumped her way gaily into the white-tiled room. Butch gave a jump as if to climb onto one of the tables.

"A lion!" he yelled.

"Butch, don't be silly," Carol said. "Tony, what a lovely dog!"

"Meet Gwendolyn." Quinn said, somewhat morosely, with his eye on expensive equipment. "Compliments of Captain McGrath."

"It's a trick!" Butch yowled, still backing away.

"Tony," Carol said, "why on Earth did McGrsth give you this dog?"

"I don't know." Quinn sat down. So did Carol, and Gwendolyn walked over and perched her head on Carol's knees, although she had practically to lie down to do it.

"McGrath said I needed s dog for a guide. Now mind you, I don't underestimate that gentleman. In fact, I'm a bit worried. Gwendolyn seems like the best natured critter I ever saw, but there is something sinister about it all. I wish I could figure it out."

Butch advanced slowly, one hand out in a peace offering.

"Say, that's some pup. She's my size dog. Anytime you want to get rid of her, let me know. Here pooch—nice pooch."

Gwendolyn turned a sleepy eye at Butch, suddenly decided she had acquired a new friend and

proved it. When Butch got up from the floor, he gratefully took the handkerchief Quinn proffered. He mopped his face, but grinned broadly.

"My size dog," he muttered. "If I was twice as big."

"Let's get down to business," Quinn said. "First of all, I have two definite suspects in mind, One is a gambler named Lee Tyler. He lives directly behind the home of Reginald Archer. Butch, your truck driver gambled, lost and was forced to work with Black Market operatives. So did Sidney Carew—and Carew lost his money at one of Tyler's gambling places."

"Rather puts Tyler on a platform all by himself," Carol mused.

"I'll elevate him even higher. Russ Bowman was in Tyler's garage not long before somebody pushed him out of the window of his apartment. So were a lot of other fellows. I'm more than ever thinking the old-time bootlegger chieftains have banded together to make a fortune out of a new type of bootlegging.

"Let's go to work on Tyler," Butch suggested.

"Not so fast," Quinn cautioned, "Reggie Archer gave a Victory ball the night Russ Bowman vanished. Bowman was last seen at that ball. It's possible Archer knows something. It's also possible that these crooks use Tyler's garage without his knowledge."

"Let's get both of 'em," Butch growled.

"That would be swell—if we had anything on them. Butch, your job tonight is to circulate around as an ex-con, down on your luck and looking for a break. Give the impression you've been in prison a long time and start asking about all those bootlegger chiefs of years ago. Find out all you can about what has become of them. Learn especially if Black Market ideas are floating around the underworld."

"Can I take her?" Butch pointed to Gwendolyn.

Quinn laughed. "No, I'm afraid Gwendolyn stays here with Silk and Carol for the present. I'm going to renew my investigation of Tyler's premises with an eye to locating any cache of rationed goods. You can drive me over, Butch, I'll be ready in a moment."

QUINN went to his locker and took out the Black Bat's regalia. He stuffed a gun into his pocket, donned the hood and swung the cape around the shoulders.

A tornado burst loose. In two bounds that rattled the bottles of chemicals, Gwendolyn had leaped on Quinn's back, sent him flat and proceeded to snarl and tear savagely at the cape. Quinn hastily got it loose and crawled away. He sat cross-legged on the floor, watching Gwendolyn rip that cape into shreds. He whistled softly in sheer surprise.

"Now I know why McGrath presented me with that Leaping Lena," he said, "He trained that dog

CAROL

to attack anyone wearing a black cape. He hoped Gwendolyn would be loose some night when I went out as the Black Bat. He knew she'd knock me down, hold me and tear the cape into shreds so McGrath could walk up triumphantly and put on the cuffs."

"Why, the—" Butch began and stopped short when he remembeted Carol.

Quinn got up. "Imagine it," he said. "McGrath actually has a brain that works. No, Mac is a capable antagonist. He is right in trying to run me down."

Quinn walked over to the locker and removed all the capes he had. He folded these quickly and handed the bundle to Silk.

"Burn them," he said firmly. "I don't need them any longer. They helped me establish a reputation. They were just stage props to throw terror into crooks. I'd even abandon these hoods if I could, but my scars identify me too completely. Also, I've changed my mind about visiting Tyler's place."

"Let Silk and me go," Carol said. "I know you think McGrath is bound to be sticking around here tonight. Pretend to give Silk the night off, let him leave by the front door. He'll find a place to apply that disguise he always wears and I'll pick him up later. We can do it, Tony."

"I don't doubt that," Quinn said. "But Tyler's estate happens to be a rather unhealthy place just now. It's infested with gunmen, but go ahead. Be careful—that's all I ask. I especially want to know if Tyler had any interest in Reggie Archer's Victory Ball, if Russ Bowman visited Tyler lately—anything else you think important. Watch out for those monkeys."

"You watch out for the one who wears a gold badge," Silk said. "I'll meet you four blocks west, Carol, in twenty minutes."

Gwendolyn followed Quinn back into the library and sat beside him as he once more assumed the pose of a blind man. Quinn rested his hand on her head and she was content.

He waited a full hour before arising and tapping his way to the front door. He put on a hat and a topcoat, seized the great dog's collar and she proudly escorted him out of the house. She seemed to know he was blind for she stopped at the steps until he cautiously felt his way with a cane.

Then they were on the sidewalk, with Gwendolyn trotting beside Quinn, and woe to anyone who came too close to them.

Suddenly, Gwendolyn growled and stopped. She was looking across the street, Quinn knew that McGrath must be there.

"Anyone you know, Gwen?" he asked, in a loud voice.

A SHADOWY form hastily detached itself from the trunk of a tree and Captain McGrath half ran across the road. Gwendolyn kept up a low growl until she recognized him, "then she became silent.

"It's McGrath, Mr. Quinn," the officer said. "I happened to be in the neighborhood so I thought I'd stop by and see how you and Gwendolyn were getting along."

"Famously," Quinn answered. "I'm in your debt, Captain."

"That's fine." McGrath didn't look too pleased. "Mind if I walk with you? Sometimes you give me ideas, and I'm working on a pretty important case just now."

"I shall be delighted," Quinn said. "What's on your mind?"

"Bootlegging rationed goods," McGrath snapped. "I'll class those birds with murderers. In fact, I hate 'em so much that if the Black Bat was working on the same case, I'd be inclined to arrange some kind of a truce."

"Splendid," Quinn approved quietly. "Only I don't happen to be the Black Bat. What's up, Captain?"

"I think a gambler named Lee Tyler runs this Black Market. It's my idea he cheats people who frequent his gambling places, then forces them to work for him. How do I know? Easy—since a chap named Sidney Carew was murdered yesterday. Of course, you never heard of him?"

"Of course," Quinn agreed firmly.

He wished McGrath would go away. Butch, Carol and Silk had been gone long enough to start telephoning in reports if they discovered anything or were in any danger, and found a chance to use a phone. He should be inside, waiting for those calls.

"Carew frequented Tyler's places and lost his shirt at one of them," McGrath went on. "Next thing he was trying to sell his friends Black Market stuff. Some of them came forward today with that information. What do you think I should do? Haul in Tyler?"

"Speaking as an attorney," Quinn answered, "I suggest not. In the first place, you have nothing on him unless, of course, you go after him for gambling, and nail him at one of his tables. Why not just let him think he's secure and jump when he is actually involved in making Black Market arrangements?"

"Good," McGrath said. "Well, I'll run along now. Take good care of Gwendolyn."

Quinn took the dog's collar again and walked slowly back, though instinct told him to run. He had reached the porch and had a key in the lock when he heard the telephone buzzing insistently.

He got the door open, flung caution to the winds and streaked toward the phone. He lifted the receiver, spoke several times, then slowly put the phone back on its cradle.

The ominous silence at the other end worried him. Slowly, he went back to close the door.

CHAPTER X
The Trap

PASSING out of the house boldly, Silk walked away. In a quiet spot he clamped a wig over his bald head. It was straw-colored and plastered with oil. He rubbed a solution into his face. This changed his complexion. Finally, he put little pieces of almost invisible wax on either side of his nose. The result was to broaden his whole face.

Silk was no past master at the art of disguise. In fact, he only knew two ways to alter his appearance. With one he became a countrified man, looking much younger than his true age. The other turned him into a pompous, stuffed-shirt banker type. Silk had used these in his days as an expert confidence man. He still used them to work with the Black Bat.

Carol met him as arranged, and quickly surveyed the disguise. She nodded, and they started walking rapidly away. It didn't take long to reach the vicinity of Archer's home.

"I'll go in first," Carol said, "and just blunder around with the idea of attracting attention if anyone is there. You follow more discreetly. We'll find out how things stand. If it's too risky, we'll postpone matters; otherwise, we carry on. Remember, we're looking for some spot where a lot of groceries or gasoline might be hidden!"

"I ought to do the blundering around," Silk objected, "but I see your point. They'll hardly suspect a girl to be dangerous, and all they'll do is question you."

"Fade," Carol told him with a grin. "I'm on my way."

She entered the driveway and did not act furtively. Everything seemed quiet and serene, but she knew better than to go by appearances.

Half-way down the drive, she hesitated. It was too quiet. Even the house was pitch dark, but through the trees she could see lights in Lee Tyler's place—unusual, because Tyler rarely missed a night at his gambling place.

Then Carol saw something sprawled across the driveway near the garage and moved forward slowly. It seemed to be a dead man. Carol half turned to call for Silk, then decided to go ahead alone. He wouldn't be far away.

She approached the man cautiously, but he never stirred. Carol bent over him, tugged at one arm and the man flopped over. There wasn't a mark on his face.

Horrified at finding a dead man, Carol called Silk's name softly. She heard him coming up fast.

A hand grasped her wrist, and Carol shrieked. The "dead" man was grasping her hand and grinning. She called a swift warning to Silk, but it was too late. They were both trapped. Silk came up with two men behind him and two guns held firmly against the small of his back.

"Well, well," the "corpse" gloated, "What have we got here? Come on, you dumb-looking halfwit, who are you?"

"I'm looking for my girl," Silk said nervously. "She got mad at me and ran away. That's her. Now look what you got us into, Martha. These men think we're burglars."

The man who had played dead threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"That one died on the vaudeville stage forty years ago," he chortled. "Come on, you two, why were you prowling here? We saw you coming and just set a little trap. It worked too. Take 'em into the garage, boys!"

SILK was pushed against a wall and slapped hard. He felt blood ooze out of a broken lip, but he maintained silence.

One of the thugs had a suggestion.

"Look, Fraser, suppose we just use a knife on him. Twist it a little. He'll talk."

"And yell, too," snapped the man called Fraser. "Nix, Pixie. Beat it to the corner and get our truck. Roll her right in here. We'll stuff these two catches inside and take them where they can yell all they want. Snap into it."

Pixie hurried away. In a few moments Carol and Silk were firmly tied and gagged. The truck backed up to the garage and they were forced into the back of it. Silk had a glimpse of the name on the side. It was an undertaker's utility truck.

Well guarded, they rode in silence. The rear doors had windows, but they were covered with black curtain material and neither Silk nor Carol had the vaguest idea of the route over which they were being taken.

Fraser, who was in charge, seemed mighty proud of his trap and kept referring to it.

"Takes us old-timers to nail snoopers," he gloated. "Cops or dry agents never fooled us a bit. We're even smarter today. Take last night—somebody prowled around, but we soon knew about it. The guy was just lucky that he got away, but maybe we'll find him now that we have you two. Want to tell me who sent you here and why?"

Silk chewed on the gag and shook his head violently.

"Tough, eh?" Fraser grinned. "Well, Pixie knows how to soften you up. I remember one night when we hijacked a certain party's booze truck. It was empty, just a tease, understand? So we got the guy who owned it and Pixie made him talk. It took thirty hours, but he talked—just before he died. Let that be a lesson to you."

The truck made a sharp turn, lurched crazily, then came to a stop. The rear doors were opened and Silk was nudged with a gun. He jumped out first, followed by Carol. They were marched into a side door of a barren sort of place, as cold as a barn and dirtier.

Deep within it however, they were forced into a well-lighted room equipped with comfortable furniture. Their gags were removed and Fraser gave Carol a drink of water.

"We'd hate to have to work on a pretty girl like you," he said. "However, that's up to your boy friend. He talks, or you yell. Either one, and looking at Pixie, I think he hopes the guy won't talk."

Carol looked at the brutal Pixie and shuddered. So did Silk. Neither he nor Carol had the faintest hope of help arriving in time to do any good, but if the Black Bat should happen to know they were prisoners and he was on the road, he might need time before be could get into action. All they could do was take a chance, and stall.

"What do you want to know?" Silk said.

Pixie scowled. Fraser sat down. "That's better," he said." First of all, do either of you know anything about the Black Bat?"

"Who doesn't?" Silk queried.

"Yes—that's true enough, but I mean do you know him personally? How well do you know him, see? He killed a friend of mine not so long ago and left one of his blasted stickers on his face. For that, the Black Bat is going to pay with his life."

"Why don't you catch him then?" Silk queried.

Fraser gave a twisted grin. "Maybe we will. Maybe you can tell us where to find him, because I've an idea you work for him. The cops don't know what this is about, but the Black Bat does. He'd be more apt to haunt Archer's place—or Tyler's—than anyone else. Or he'd send some of his friends—you two."

"Thanks for the compliment," Silk said, "but I don't know the Black Bat. He's not in my class. If you want the truth, we were heading for Tyler's place to try and lay our hands on some of that gambling cash he keeps around all the time."

"Fraser," Pixie said, "he's lying. Let me go to work on him. Or on the girl. We ain't got time to waste. There'll be a meeting soon and we've got to be there. I'll loosen his tongue in five minutes."

FRASER seemed to he thinking it over. Carol sod Silk were thinking too. Butch might have run scross their trail somewhere. He usually could smell trouble a mile away. He seemed to be their only hope, with Tony Quinn more or less confined to the house by the combined vigilance of Captain McGrath and Gwendolyn.

The third crook, who had been left somewhere outside as a guard, hurried into the room.

"Fraser," he said, "a couple of the boys are bringing a pal of yours here. The guy is okay—on parole right now according to the papers he showed. Used to know you in the old days and he's looking for an in."

"What's his name?" Fraser demanded. "Lot's of my pals were sent up. I ... Oh, never mind. I'll see him. We need all the help we can get. Have him wait in the office. Be there in a couple of minutes."

Fraser turned back to Carol and Silk, "This is your last chance, understand?" Then he said to Pixie, "Work on the guy a little, but don't touch the girl—yet. I've got my own ideas about how to make her talk. A dame can stand anything except getting her face changed."

Fraser walked out, passed through a narrow hallway and entered a smaller room fitted up as an office. Butch occupied one of the chairs and Butch jumped up instantly.

"Pal!" he extended his hand, debating whether or not to break this man's neck on general principle. "Oh, boy, what a joke this is! You don't even remember me."

Fraser eyed him suspiciously. "Who are you?"

Butch rocked with laughter. "I knew it would be like this. I used to work for you—in Chi. I was just a young squirt, but I grew up. Mostly in prison. They grabbed me on one of your trucks and ... Well, I didn't like cops then any more than I do now, and one of 'em got hurt. So they sent me up. I got out weeks ago and, believe me, I've had some job finding you."

Fraser was still leery of this giant.

"I used to employ a lot of people," he said. "Didn't pay much attention to some of them. Name some of the boys who worked with you."

"Well, I—" Butch began.

He was interrupted by a cry of pain from somewhere outside. But Butch's only reaction was a tightening of his fingers into massive fists, though that had been Silk's voice.

It was followed by a cry from a woman. Carol! Butch licked his lips, started moving toward Fraser and stopped. Fraser grunted angrily, told Butch to sit down and ordered the crook to get back to his post. Fraser hurried away.

Butch reached for the telephone on the desk and dialed Tony Quinn's house. There was no answer. A fine film of sweat broke out on his forehead. He hadn't the slightest idea how many killers were in this building. He didn't know whether or not he could reach Carol and Silk without placing them in greater jeopardy than they were now, but if he didn't get a call through soon, he meant to start tearing the whole place apart.

The sounds from the other room stopped. Apparently, Fraser didn't want his prisoners tortured quite so much—or just now. Fraser would return in a moment or two. Butch dialed again.

This time he almost blew the phone over with an exhalation of relief.

"It's me," he said. "I'm at a warehouse at the end of Carmody Street. I just heard Carol and Silk. They're here, too, and we're all in a pretty tough spot. Come fast. I'll try to hold things up until you get here."

BUTCH dropped the phone and picked up the chair he had occupied. He wrenched it apart and made a sizable club out of one leg. Holding this, he opened the door and peered down the dark corridor. All he could see was a light at the end of it, and he could hear angry voices.

Butch started down the corridor on tiptoe. Nearing the door, he raised the club and prepared to leap into action. Butch hadn't seen Fraser quietly moving toward him from the rear. But Fraser had spotted Butch, had ducked into a cubby-hole and let him pass. Now Fraser held a clubbed gun high.

He ran lightly forward. Butch heard him, but as he spun his massive bulk around, Fraser crashed down with the heavy gun butt. It hit Butch squarely between the eyes. His grip on the club loosened and it clattered to the floor. Butch tried to raise his hands to fight and Fraser struck him again. Butch leaned wearily against the wall, slid to his knees, then pitched forward on his face.

TONY QUINN hung up and hastened to his laboratory, with Gwen trotting at his heels. Quinn tried to shoo her away, but the dog refused to leave him. Quinn finally let her go into the lab and determined to keep her there. To do that, he would have to disappear down the tunnel when she was not looking.

Quinn quickly changed to the somber raiments of the Black Bat. He put on his large hat, placed the hood into a pocket and made sure his gun was ready.

The dog lay with her head on her paws, apparently sound asleep. Quinn moved softly toward the trap.door, opened it and dropped out-of-sight. He didn't close it. With the trap in the garden house closed, no one could enter.

When he reached the top of the narrow stairway at the garden house, everything wss silent. He stepped out of the tunnel, closed the trap softly and then started toward the garden gate. He saw Butch's cheap little coupé parked up the street and thanked his lucky stars that Butch had not taken the car with him.

If he had, the Black Bat would have been compelled to use one of Tony Quinn's cars and take a terrific risk of being detected. But he felt then that McGrath had called it a night—that helped, for any delay might mean the deaths of Butch and Silk and Carol.

He had started to get in the car when he heard a thumping sound. Then Gwendolyn came galloping out of the garden entrance, going full speed ahead. Quinn hastily piled behind the wheel, just in time to avoid being flattened by the animal as she leaped in.

Gwendolyn wriggled into an upright position, three.quarters filling the small car. The Black Bat ordered her out, but she only made an attempt to wash his face. The Black Bat risked a few seconds of precious time, got out himself and ran around the car. He grasped Gwendolyn by the shoulders and tugged. The dog didn't even stir.

The Black Bat gave up. He slid behind the wheel again and rolled away. One thing—the dog certainly kept him from being seen through the right hand window.

CHAPTER XI
Human Target

QUINN pulled up not far from the warehouse which Butch had described. Everything was as silent as a grave. The Black Bat pondered his problem of a dog for a moment, but there was nothing he could do about her, so he let her follow along.

If McGrath happened to be about, his suspicions would grow red hot if he laid eyes on the dog, but there was no help for it now. The Black Bat grasped Gwen by her collar and somehow she seemed to realize that stealth was required of her. She actually crawled along, making no sound whatever, her ears raised, her mighty jaws closed tight.

The Black Bat studied the bleak building, and decided that here was one of the most logical spots where contraband might be hidden.

He approached a side door warily, gun ready for quick action.

He didn't have to warn Gwendolyn to be quiet. She seemed to grasp his unspoken orders.

The door was locked. The Black Bat took keys from his pocket, cleverly made keys that fitted almost any lock. This cheap one was no exception. He found a key that fitted and opened the door a crack.

Nothing but darkness, and a lot of old packing crates. He heard no sounds at all and a cold wave of apprehension came over him. Was he too late?

The Black Bat put a hand on Gwendolyn's head after they had slipped inside. He exerted a little pressure and the dog sat down quietly. She didn't move as Quinn backed away from her, not even when he turned his back and headed for an aisle between packing cases.

Once the Black Bat stopped and cocked his head. He had heard a faint sound, like the intake of breath through the mouth of an astonished man. That happened just when he passed across faint rays of light from a window. It didn't come again so be continued to move forward. Perhaps the sound had been Gwendolyn panting.

The Black Bat knew he was in danger. Any number of men might be lying in wait behind any of those stacks of cases. They would be well bidden too and even his abnormal eyesight would not help any in spotting them.

Besides he could not delay any longer. His friends were in even greater danger than he was. They depended on him and no amount of risk would cause him to let them down.

He was grateful that Gwendolyn had stayed put. The dog was smart—much smarter then he had given her credit for being. Then the Black Bat's eyes, darkness-piercing eyes, saw a door. No light shone beneath it, but he was at least going in the right direction.

Passing a pile of crates, he heard a brushing sound and, before he could move, a gun was solidly poked against his back. The Black Bat emitted a low groan and slowly raised his hands.

"One crack and you get it, right through the spine!" his captor whispered. "Turn around and let's have a look at you. This place is full of phonies tonight."

The Black Bat turned, ready to take any chance if he saw one. His captor was about his own size. Enough faint light filtered into the big place so that the crook could see the hood on the head of the man he was holding at gun's point.

"The Black Bat!" he choked, and stepped back a bit. But his gun came up level before the Black Bat could move into action. "No, you don't! I'm not scared of you. Not when I've got the drop. So those birds we got do work for you, huh? Boy, won't Fraser be tickled to see you here!"

THE BLACK BAT said nothing and the crook seemed s trifle disappointed. At his command, the Black Bat placed his own gun atop a pile of cases.

"I'll collect a nice wad for this," the crook gloated. "There ain't a right guy who won't chip in and help make up a fat reward. Biggest day of my life! Now get this. I'll let you have it at the first phony move. Start walking backwards. I'll tell you when to turn."

The Black Bat obeyed. Suddenly, the crook whispered a command for him to halt.

"Who's with you?" he demanded.

"I'm alone," the Black Bat answered. "Quite alone."

But over the crook's shoulder the Black Bat saw Gwendolyn slowly approaching with her great head cocked to one side as if she wanted to understand this situation. She stopped about a dozen yards behind the crook.

"I don't think I'll go any further," the Black Bat said. "What are you going to do about it?"

The gun steadied. "Put a slug through your heart—or pistolwhip you. Maybe the boys would like to have you alive. Either you move or I'll brain you and drag you into the office."

"Go ahead," the Black Bat said quietly.

The crook hesitated, sensing a trap, but he was sure the Black Bat was helpless. If he tried to fight, the gun could be put into use instantly. The crook raised the weapon.

He had started to bring it down when a rushing sound made his knees all but buckle. He half twisted and the Black Bat grasped his gun hand in a grip that paralyzed all fingers and prevented him from pulling the trigger.

Gwendolyn hit the man high on the shoulders snd sent him hurtling forward. He went down on top of the Black Bat and stayed there, because the Black Bat jolted one hard, short right punch to the jaw that connected. He slid from beneath the man, eased him to the floor, then struck once more to make sure the fellow would be inactive during the next few minutes.

Gwendolyn uttered a low growl. The Black Bat petted her head, saw a piece of rope on the floor and picked it up. He tied this around the dog's head.

"Thanks, old girl," he said, "but from here on, you stay out of it. I don't want any stray bullets to get you."

He tied the other end of the rope to the lowest crate of a tall stack of them. He spoke to the dog again in a whisper and she lay down promptly, her eyes on the fallen crook. Evidently, she assumed that she was to guard him.

When the Black Bat moved away cautiously, the dog made no attempt to arise. The Black Bat

found the door open and stepped into the office from which Butch had phoned.

Two shots rang out that made his heart stand still. Then someone laughed harshly. The Black Bat, with his own gun ready, headed in the direction of the shots. Another one blasted. Three prisoners—three shots. The Black Bat's lips were drawn tight, his eyes were suddenly hard and bitter.

Then he heard Butch's tremendous roar. Carol's voice reached him.

"Don't talk!" Carol cried defiantly. "Never mind what happens to me. They can kill us, but they can't kill what we represent. Don't talk."

"Put the next ones a little closer," came a man's hard voice, and then—the last one, "I'm getting sick of this."

REACHING another room at the end of the narrow corridor, the Black Bat saw Carol, standing against the further wall. She held her head high, although her lower lip quivered a little. In the wall beside her head were three bullet-holes in perfect alignment. And before the Black Bat's eyes at that moment, one of the three men in that room carefully aimed a gun and fired. Another hole appeared closer to Carol's ear.

The gunman crooked one arm, rested the muzzle of the pistol against it, and drew another bead. Butch and Silk, well tied, were being forced to witness murder. The man who apparently was their leader—Fraser, though, the Black Bat did not as yet know that—stood before Butch and Silk, rocking back and forth on his heels.

"Well," he said, "you've seen what my friend can do with a gun. If that girl had moved, she would have died. She has courage: Too much to be blasted through the face by a thirty-eight slug. It's up to you, boys. I'll ask once more, give you two minutes by my watch, and then—"

"Don't talk!" Carol repeated gamely. "Don't say a word! They'll kill us anyway."

"Shut up," Fraser growled. "Pixie, if she makes one more crack, slug her."

Pixie moved forward, fist doubled. Fraser turned back to Butch and Silk.

"You boys were snooping sround a cetain garage because you knew there was going to be an important meeting there tonight. I want to know who told you and who sent you. Was it the Black Bat?"

Silk half opened his mouth, took a look at Carol and closed it again. Butch just kept his eyes tightly shut, but the Black Bat could see him straining against those ropes. If he ever got loose, there weren't enough bullets in the place to stop him from finishing Carol's tormentors.

Fraser shrugged. "Stand aside, Pixie. This time the girl gets it. I'm through fooling around."

The gunman nodded, raised his crooked arm again and sighted along the barrel. There was a shot. The gunman just stood there for a second or two, as if he were entranced. But the side of his head was growing bloodier every fraction of a second. The gun he held sagged. Then the man fell forward, as a tree falls.

At that instant, the lights went out. The Black Bat surged through the door, hut suddenly realized he dealt with resourceful men. Fraser had instantly sensed what had happened and who had arrived. In one flying leap he had seized Carol.

"The door, Pixie!" Fraser yelled. "I've got the girl. If any shots are fired at us, she gets the first one. It's only one guy! I saw him. We can make it, with the other two tied up."

"You can't make it!" the Black Bat's voice thundered. "This warehouse is surrounded! It's full of men who will shoot you on sight!"

"Listen to this girl then," Fraser shouted hack. "Go ahead sister! Tell him it ain't no orchid sticking against your ear."

"He has a gun pressed against my head," Carol said, with only a faint tremolo in her voice.

"Yeah!" Fraser cried triumphantly. "And if one shot is fired or anybody even starts my way, I'll shoot! Don't think you're fooling me either. There's nobody in this place but you."

"Just a moment," the Black Bat said. "Listen to a warning. If that girl is even scratched, I'll not turn any of you over to the police. Justice will be administered right here and by me—the Black Bat."

PIXIE yelped at that.

"See?" he screamed. "I was right! That's who Russ Bowman meant when he was talking about a secret weapon and some guy who'd use it. I figured all along that—"

"Shut up, you fool!" Fraser snapped.

"This is all bluff. What if he is the Black Bat? That doesn't make him a superman. I'm getting out of here and I'm taking the girl along. Maybe I'll let her have a slug through the head and maybe not. It all depends."

"You won't get twenty feet from the door," the Black Bat warned. "I tell you there's a small army of men within ear-shot. If you kill the glrl, you can't possibly get away. If you don't, there might be a chance. Killing her will only insure your own death—and it won't be a pleasant one, I can assure you of that."

"Maybe he's right," Pixie squealed. "If the joint is full of coppers, what chance have we got? Let the dame go and make a break for it."

"He's bluffing," Fraser repeated.

"I'm going to whistle, Fraser. That's the

prearranged signal. They'll close in. They'll shoot you in the back without hurting the girl. Bluffing, am I?"

The Black Bat slipped two fingers under his hood and emitted a piercing whistle. Instantly, there was a terrific crash somewhere behind Fraser. Then it sounded as if a small army was converging on him, He let go of Carol, yelled for Pixie to make his own escape and both went catapulting into the darkness.

The Black Bat raced forward too, passed Carol, and kept on going.

Gwendolyn, dragging a big packing case after her, was trying to locate her master and the source of that whistle. The Black Bat's eyes, penetrating the darkness, saw Fraser dart through a door, with Pixie after him.

The Black Bat fired twice, so fast that both shots sounded almost as one. Pixie was hurled against the side of the door by the force of those bullets. He screamed in pain, but somehow managed to stagger out of sight.

When the Black Bat reached the exit, both were gone, but smears of blood indicated that Pixie had been badly wounded and had been reeling against the walls. A resounding clatter announced that Gwendolyn was coming on. The Black Bat turned back into the warehouse. There wasn't even a sign of the thug he and Gwendolyn had knocked out.

CHAPTER XII
Open Warfare

FOUR rather bedraggled-looking people stumbled into Tony Quinn's laboratory after a quick trip home, Butch's head was bloody and wrists swollen from the pressure he had put on the ropes that held him. Silk's face also had been battered.

Carol sat down weakly and the Black Bat peeled off his somber regalia.

Only Gwendolyn seemed gay and ready for more action. She galloped from one to another, accepting their pats and praise as if she readily understood the part she had played in this game of life and death.

"Whatever I've held for Captain McGrath has been wiped out tonight," Quinn said. "Gwendolyn is worth her weight in gold—almost. She obeys, understands, and when she attacks, there aren't many people who could stand up against her. She saved our skins tonight. Fraser would have carried out his threat to shoot Carol if Gwen hadn't convinced him the whole warehouse was full of cops."

"And that's all it was full of," Carol groaned. "There wasn't a single iota of evidence there to show it had ever been used as a Black Market supply base."

"Perhaps they intended to use it in the future," Quinn said. "At any rate, we prevented the meeting in Tyler's garage. Fraser must have sent the word around promptly."

Silk got up and called Gwendolyn. "Did you deliberately take the dog with you, sir?" he asked.

"Why, no, Silk, she—she—insisted on coming along. Why?"

"Probably McGrath also trained her to follow you. If you don't mind, sir, I'll feed her and treat this swelling on my face. Carol can tell you just what happened and in case McGrath is snooping, I'd better be around outside."

"Go to it, Silk.." Quinn nodded. "Remember what Gwendolyn did for us, and weigh her rations accordingly. If there is anything left?"

"Yes, sir," Silk said, "Just the same you were lucky that McGrath wasn't around. The dog is all right. I—I rather like her. But McGrath has something coming."

After Silk left. Tony Quinn listened to Carol tell how she was trapped,

"I worked around several joints and broadcast the word that I was an old pal of a lot of bootleggers," Butch said then. "I asked about them, and finally one guy mentioned Fraser. I wanted to meet him so it was arranged doggone quick. They took me to that warehouse—but you know what happened after that. When I think of the way Fraser ordered Carol shot, I get so mad—"

"Well, stay mad," Quinn said. "When we round up these rats, you can crack as many heads as you wish. That man Pixie used to be a terror. Though it was never proved, he was responsible for many murders during Prohibition days, and he hasn't changed any!"

"I'll change him," Butch growled.

"Tony," Carol said, "Pixie is just a brute without much brains. Fraser is smarter, but he doesn't seem to have the ability to head an organization as big as the Black Market. I'm certain someone directs every move he makes."

"And so am I," Quinn agreed. "But, whoever he is, he stays well in the background and protects himself by every device he can think up. His anonymity insures not only his personal safety, but his ability to carry on so well. These hijacking jobs, warehouse raids and a general canvass of retail merchants, show a fine hand. Someone who knows how to handle big things. Our toughest job will be bringing this man into the open because, until he shows himself, we'll only rake in minor actors. We've declared war against these people, and we're going to attack."

"I wonder who owns that warehouse?" Butch speculated.

QUINN shrugged.

"Probably someone who doesn't know what's going on. It's possible those thugs just moved in and made themselves at home. We'll get nowhere investigating those angles, because they'll be well covered. No—our real leader must be forced out of his hole and exposed."

Carol sighed, "How can that be done?"

"Right now, I've only a glimmer," Quinn acknowledged. "But possibly if we sleep on it, something will take shape. You two get some rest. In the morning both of you go out and approach various grocers. See how they react to a proposition to deal in Black Market stuff."

"I'll feel like a heel," Butch grunted.

"Perhaps, but it's necessary. You especially, Butch, must try to determine whether or not any grocers have been appoached so far. You'll be insulted at most places, but a few may accept you. Carol won't get far. They'll take her as an O.P.A. investigator and close up like clams. However, Carol, you might run into a few interesting leads."

Butch departed at once. Carol remained for a time. Moments alone with Tony Quinn were precious to her. They planned to marry some day, but so long as the Black Bat operated against crime and traitors, there was no time for marriage. Yet talking about such a day to come made the waiting somewhat easier.

Quinn helped Carol into the tunnel finally, then returned to his study. His eyes were blank and staring once more, for he carried on his pretense of being blind whenever there was the slightest chance that he might be under observation.

Suddenly, the whole house shook under a terrific *crash*. Alarmed, Quinn tapped his way to the front hall and looked up the staircase.

Gwendolyn came bounding out of one room, loped down the upper corridor and plunged into another room. There came a crash similar to the first one.

"Silk?" Quinn called. "What the devil is going on up there?"

Silk appeared, slightly disheveled, but there was a triumphant grin on his face which he tried hard to erase.

"Sorry, sir, if I disturbed you. Gwendolyn and I have a new game. She's quite a dog, sir, I hope you don't intend disposing of her."

"After the way she acted tonight?"

Quinn climbed the stairs. "Silk, Gwendolyn has joined the forces of the Black Bat. And I've a feeling she will more than earn her keep."

"I know she will, sir." Silk bobbed his head energetically. "You don't mind if we romp a bit during the day and at night, sir? She plays a little rough, and is noisy of course, but—"

"Keep her happy," Quinn said. "Now let's go to bed. I haven't slept in forty-eight hours and there's a lot of work to be done tomorrow. You'll be in it, I think."

"I shall be looking forward to it," Silk said fervently. "Those crooks are bad, but what they're doing is worse. Taking food out of the mouths of people. Creating shortages, robbing warehouses of goods intended for our Armed Forces and our allies. They deserve to be shot!"

Quinn tapped his way to his bedroom and Gwendolyn followed him. Half an hour later, Quinn wondered if his bed would stand up under the terrific weight, but Gwendolyn could be obstinate and this was one of the times. She sprawled across the foot of the bed, snored and stirred as if she were battling all the Black Market agents in the world. With each stir, the bed creaked and rocked dangerously.

Quinn finally crept softly to a guest room and locked the door, then thought better of it. He couldn't afford new doors and Gwendolyn was big enough to crash through almost anything. Wisely he left the door open.

THE following morning, Silk drove up to the entrance of Fred Stevenson's rather large manufacturing plant. He opendd the car door for Tony Quinn and helped him out. Gwendolyn started to emerge and Silk spoke to her quietly, but with force. The huge dog sprawled out on the back seat and gave a deep sigh of resignation.

"I'm training her," Silk said proudly. "She obeys and learns rapidly."

"Any more games like the one you were playing last night and I might have to build a new house," Quinn said. "And get a harness for her. One of those with a handle, like Seeing Eye dogs wear."

"I've already arranged for it," Silk said. "I visited several pet shops, and gave Gwendolyn's measurements, but they all threw up their hands. I finally found someone who will have a harness ready late this afternoon. It's a—harness shop, sir. For horses."

They climbed the steps into the main office of the factory.

Stevenson had them admitted to his private office promptly. He greeted Quinn and escorted him to a comfortable chair.

"I've come about those anonymous tips your employees provide," Quinn explained. "Something rather unusual has turned up."

"I'll help all I can," Stevenson offered. "I am a busy man, but these things must take precedence. Don't tell me those tips were wrong?"

"Well, not exactly. But some of the grocers and butchers who were complained about were not really dealing in Black Market goods. They overshot ceiling prices in some cases. They even declared their ice-boxes empty when they had made by your employees have the earmarks of grudges."

Stevenson smacked the flat of his desk with an open hand.

"I'll talk to them again. I don't want grudges brought out. Just information about places where Black Market dealings actually take place."

"Excellent," Quinn said, his head bent, listening. "By the banging and sounds of machines I hear, your plant must be going full blast."

"Two full shifts," Stevenson declared proudly, "One department works three. It's a rather secret business, this third department. We're developing something I hope will surprise Hitler."

Stevenson's inter-office communication system buzzed. He excused himself and flicked a switch. His secretary's voice came over.

"Mr. Archer is waiting to see you, sir."

"Send him in," Stevenson said, He swiveled around to face Quinn. "I'm glad Reggie Archer came at this moment. You'll see a rather good example of how a man reforms, and how he bends his efforts to help win the war."

Archer came in, hesitated at the sight of Quinn and Silk, then laid a sheaf of papers on Stevenson's desk.

"These are the reports you wanted, Mr. Stevenson. I hope they're okay."

"I'm sure of it," Stevenson said, "Meet Tony Quinn. You've heard of him. The lawyer who was blinded by crooks."

"VERY pleased."

Archer extended his hand without too much enthusiasm. Quinn didn't see it—apparently.

"Thanks," Quinn said, "I'm rather surprised to find a man of your wealth and social position working in a factory, Mr. Archer. And really working, too. When you entered this office, I smelled oil on your clothing. That's how I know you're not on some desk job."

"I didn't want a desk job," Archer said. "You know my record of course. It's nothing to brag about, but I realize now that every man has to pitch into this battle. I once mastered the art of speeding up production and Mrs. Stevenson kindly had faith enough to give me a chance."

"I don't often misjudge men," Stevenson said, "and I don't care a bang about former records. Ability is all that counts. How are things shaping up on Number Five, Archer?"

"Good. I'd better go down there though. Goodbye, Mr. Quinn."

"Amazing what a war will bring out in a man," Stevenson commented when Archer had left. "By the way, would you like to look around? I ... There I go again. Quinn, I keep forgetting you're blind. You act so normal."

"I would be delighted to look around," Quinn smiled. "I do my looking with my nose, my ears and my sense of touch. I'd really like to hear your machines humming. Every turn of the wheel means something more has been created to help us win our war."

Stevenson personally escorted them. He explained things as they progressed. Silk took an active interest too, as he guided Quinn around machinery. Silk indicated to Stevenson one portion of a large room where four uniformed guards stood before a doorway.

Stevenson nodded, "My secret, gentlemen. I couldn't even take a blind man in there. Government orders. Those guards are there to enforce them. Ten men work behind that wall, every one highly trusted and highly skilled."

"Don't pry, Silk." Quinn chuckled. "But we can't take up any more of your time, Mr. Stevenson. Silk can lead us out of here. Thank you for the privilege and for your cooperation in fighting this Black Market."

Silk and Quinn crossed the yards a few moments later on their way to where the car was parked.

"Some place," Quinn commented. "Buzzing like a beehive."

"Odd though, that Archer happens to be working there," said Quinn. "He certainly has an opportunity to stuff those boxes where anonymous tips are left."

Silk whistled softly. "I never thought of that. And Archer just doesn't seem the type to bury himself in grease and oil. Maybe we've run onto something, sir."

He helped Quinn into the car. Gwendolyn greeted them enthusiastically, but settled down without tipping the car over.

"I'd like to get a list of Reggie Archer's guests the night of the Victory Ball," Quinn mused, "Especially to see if Russ Bowman's name is there—and Lee Tyler's. He's still in the running, even if he puts on as good a front as I have ever seen."

"Carol could get the list," said Silk. "She's a whiz at that stuff."

"I'll have her attend to it later," Quinn said. "Drive me to the rationing office, Silk. These days,

if I get a look into my own office, I'm going some."

CHAPTER XIII
Groundwork of a Plan

WHEN Quinn entered the rationing office, several people were waiting to see him. He handled their cases neatly, then a grocer named Hawkes was ushered in. Hawkes seemed nervous.

"I have come for advice," he said. "I own a market and have been in business for fourteen years. I pay my bills and I try to be honest. But I am giving it all up. Throwing everything away."

"Why on Earth should you do such a thing?" Quinn asked.

"Because I hate trouble. Profits from my store have dwindled, of course, but that isn't the great difficulty. Yesterday a man comes to see me. A cruel-looking man who wants to know if I'd like to buy a lot of canned ham. He had a sample with him. It was the finest—and I'll bet my shirt it was bootleg stuff."

"We've been hearing a lot about instances like that," Quinn said. "Why should he drive you out of business?"

"I told him I wouldn't trade with any Black Market, You should have heard the prices he quoted. Immense is a mild word for them. Then he got tough. He said I'd buy or find myself without a business. He warned about burglaries, broken windows, fires and even accidents to myself and my wife."

"Did you agree to make a purchase?" Quinn asked.

"Yes, because I was afraid for my wife. She's sick and it's not worth the risk. I wanted to see you about whether or not I need permission to sell and how I should handle the rationing coupons I have on hand."

"You have a buyer all ready?"

Hawkes shook his head. "No—but I intend to advertise. I want to get out before those men make trouble for me. This one who came—he could have torn me apart. A great big man with a lopsided face. You musn't tell I was here. He said if I told, he would kill me."

"And that," Quinn sighed, "is what our boys are fighting for. It seems we have a little war on the home front. Mr. Hawkes; you will be protected. Sell out if you wish. That's your problem, but no harm will come to you. I promise that."

Hawkes was grateful and relieved when he went out.

Silk came in from the adjoining office with Gwendolyn pounding along beside him.

"It's the old-time shakedown stuff," Silk groaned. "The way those monkeys acted during Prohibition. They'd walk into some innocent guy's place and tell him he would sell illicit hootch or else. And he'd buy it from them—or else, again."

Quinn nodded slowly. "Yes, Silk,.That was the way it was handled, You forgot one thing, however. As soon as this innocent man was launched into selling liquor, a representative of another gang would come along and demand he throw out his stock of goods and buy another lot—from the next gangster, of course. Then a war began between rival gangs."

"Only this time," Silk commended dryly, "there are no rival gangs. This mysterious head of the organization sewed them all up under his control."

"Suppose a new gang reared its head, Silk. Suppose it seemed powerful enough to undermine all the work our mysterious leader has so far accomplished and blow the whole game wide open to the tune of guns and blood? Silk. you're going into the grocery business."

"The grocery business?" Silk gasped.

"Exactly. Run down to the bank and cash a substantial check. Approach this Mr. Hawkes who just left and make him a good offer. Move in, and when that canned ham is delivered, try to get a line on where it came from. Size up the men. Haggle with them, draw them out. It's the one approach we have left. Developed properly, it will bring results. Get busy on it at once, and you'd better use one of those disguises. Not the one those crooks saw."

WHILE Silk took care of this, Quinn interviewed people who needed help. The rationing problem was tremendous, and he boiled inside at the thoughts of such men as Pixie Pax and Fraser *disrupting carefully laid plans for every man,* woman and child to get the proper share of food and necessities. The plans that likewise insured the delivery of ample supplies to the Armed Forces and starving overseas nations.

That night Silk reported the deal with Hawkes closed and that tomorrow he would take over the store.

"I've only one request, sir," said Silk. "That I be allowed to come back here nights. I—I would miss Gwendolyn."

"Of course, Silk. That dog has certainly captured your affections."

"Yes, sir—and we've a little secret between us. Don't ask me what it is, please."

Before Quinn could pry any further, he heard a car pull up and then footsteps on the porch.

"Police Commissioner Warner," Quinn said promptly. "I recognize his steps. Let him in, Silk. I think the worthy Commissioner is worried about something."

Warner came in, sat down beside Quinn, bit off the end of a cigar and applied flame. He puffed slowly for a few seconds before be gave an indication of what was on his mind.

"You probably realize I've something on my mind, Tony," he finally said. "Frankly, it's driving me crazy. We've a Black Market in our midst."

Quinn laughed. "Have you forgotten that I'm chairman of a rationing board, Commissioner? I've known that for days."

"But not all of it," Warner said quickly. "Did you know that there has been a wave of crimes. robberies of food warehouses? Hijacking of trucks? Gasoline rationing books stolen by the thousands? It's all around us, Tony, and we can't lay a finger on anyone even remotely responsible for any of it. We have only one good suspect, and he is an expert at keeping his hands clean."

"Yes?" Quinn urged.

"I'm talking about Lee Tyler, the gambler. Captain McGrath is on a permanent assignment to run down the Black Market—when he finds time to leave you alone—and McGrath is about convinced that Tyler heads this Black Market."

"What has he got to go on?" Quinn asked.

"Not too much. There were two murders, and both victims had been wiped out by gambling at Tyler's places. They were then compelled to act for the Black Market in order to earn money enough to get even. McGrath wants to make a pinch, but I'm not so sure."

"Don't," Quinn advised. "Give Tyler rope enough. Right now, you'd never convict him of anything more than running gambling houses. Make McGrath bide his time!"

Warner took a deep puff and exhaled slowly.

"Coming from you that sounds like good advice. Tony, you realize I don't completely share McGrath's opinion that you are the Black Bat. Sometimes I wonder, of course. Recently, it has seemed to me that you must have been in actual contact with him. Can you reach him again?"

"No," Quinn said promptly. "I'm afraid not."

"Too bad." Warner smiled slightly. "If you could, I'd ask him to join forces with us this time. Call upon us for any help we can give. He could handle this. It takes a man who isn't hampered by red tape to get at those filthy leeches. I believe even McGrath would call a truce."

"He already offered to," Quinn said. "In fact, McGrath seems to have changed in his attitude toward me. He went so far as to make me a present of a dog, Commissioner. To lead me around. A nice gesture, don't you think?"

COMMISSIONER WARNER leaned forward and dropped his voice.

"Watch out, Tony. McGrath neither forgives nor forgets. If he gave you a dog, there is something behind it. Don't let him trip you up."

Quinn laughed. "You sound as if you no longer doubt but that I'm the Black Bat. And you're actually trying to help me. Isn't that a peculiar thing for a police commissioner to do? After all, there is a warrant out for the Black Bat's arrest."

"Oh darn it, Tony, you know how I feel about you. Black Bat or blind man, I don't care which, I'm on your side. Sometimes I pray you are the Black Bat. Just in case—mind you, I accent those words—I'll tell you something else."

"And just in case, I'll listen most attentively," said Quinn.

"Tyler is noted as an honest gambler," Warner said. "Sounds funny, doesn't it, but so far as I can discover he never has cheated a man. He's satisfied with percentages. Well, Tyler has kept his gambling houses as clean as a whistle. No mugs, no ex-convicts. Nothing like that until lately. Now some of his places have dice men and dealers with records longer than your arm."

Quinn's smile faded. This was astonishing news. It definitely implicated Tyler to the hilt. Perhaps some of the men operating the Black Market worked for him as a sideline. Anything was possible in this game.

"I still believe it would be foolish to raid his places and arrest him for gambling," Quinn said. "He would be free in no time and carrying on as before. Besides, he would watch his step still more carefully, because he would know you were suspicious of him. Let him go, Commissioner. Give him free rein, and if he is guilty, he'll stumble. All men do."

Before Warner could comment, a heavy pounding on the staircase announced the coming of Gwendolyn. She bounded into the room and showed her trust in Warner by stepping up on his knees and licking his face.

Then Gwendolyn cocked her head as if she heard something beyond the range of human ears. She got down and trotted over toward the bookcase behind which lay the laboratory. Quinn gulped. Of all times to act this way, Gwendolyn had picked the worst. He knew what bothered her. Carol and Butch were inside, waiting to report on their day's activities.

Gwendolyn pawed at the bookcase. Warner gaped at her.

"Don't tell me she reads," he said.

"I wouldn't doubt it," Quinn said uneasily, "What's she doing?"

"As far as I can see, she intends to delve into your set of Dumas. There must be something there."

Warner started to arise. Silk butled into the room. He carried a tray on which a napkin had been carelessly thrown. Silk hurried over beside the bookcase and stood with his back toward Warner. He kept nudging Gwendolyn away.

Finally, Silk turned around and his face was slightly red.

"She must be after something, sir," he said to Quinn. "Shall I take a look?"

"By all means," Quinn said. "Those are expensive volumes."

Silk removed several of them. Gwendolyn poked her nose into the space and pranced away with a bone between her teeth. Silk tried to suppress his exhalation of relief.

"She had hidden a bone there and wanted it," Silk said.

"Remarkable," Warner said. "But would you mind telling me how she put that bone behind the books?"

"Oh—that," Silk gulped. "She's a remarkable dog, sir. Just as you said. She does things we cannot explain, sir."

"I should say so," Warner commented.

"Well anyhow, if the gasoline shortage becomes too acute, you could buy a wagon and hitch her up. Remarkable? That's mild. Extremely mild for a dog who can remove half a dozen books, hide a bone and replace the books. Good night, Tony—and remember me to the Black Bat. That is, if you run across him."

TONY QUINN turned away from the door after Commissioner Warner had gone and solemnly extended his hand to Silk.

"You saved us that time," he said. "Warner was just about to prowl."

"Doggone dog." Silk glanced at the big animal, then had to grin. Her tail kept whacking the wall until a picture slid lopsided. "Believe me, McGrath knew how we'd be tortured when he gave us this elephant. Could I—ah—teach her a few things, sir? While you are busy with Carol and Butch?"

"Certainly. But for Pete's sake, teach her to stay away from the secret door to the lab. If that had been McGrath, he'd have the riot squad here with axes by now. Warner suspects something, but he doesn't want to confirm his suspicions. Come into the lab in fifteen minutes. After that, you can romp with Gwendolyn for the rest of the night if you wish."

CHAPTER XIV
Forced Sale

IN THE library, Quinn made certain that the window shades were fully drawn. Then he went into the laboratory to be greeted by Carol and Butch.

Carol reported first.

"Tony, a Black Market doesn't enjoy the same reception bootleggers used to get. Most storekeepers don't want anything to do with it!"

"I hoped we'd discover something like that." Quinn nodded in approval. "Prohibition was an experiment that didn't work. Black Market is a detriment to our winning the war, and people are not going to impede their own efforts. Not even if a lot of money is involved."

"I found some today willing to buy Black Market stuff," Butch put in.

"There are always a few," Quinn answered, "but this time not enough to make the operator of the Black Market as rich as some of those old-time beer barons were. That's why the gang is resorting to intimidation. Buy their stuff or else. Cases like that are already coming before the rationing boards. It's time we stopped these crooks."

"Got any ideas, boss?" Butch asked.

"Yes. Can you locate Pixie Pax? He's wounded, I know I hit him at least once, but I think it was in the shoulder or arm and by now he'll be in action again. I need Pixie."

"He's holed up some place," Butch reported, "but I happen to know he visits a certain doctor who fixes up bullet wounds without asking any questions. Pixie is bound to show up there sooner or later for treatment. I asked around, and Pixie has one arm in a sling."

"Then here is what you do," Quinn said. "First, have Silk change your appearance some, He can switch the color of your hair and make you look darker or lighter. Then go out and get Pixie. I want him intact, Butch, understand?"

"It'll take all my will power," Butch grumbled. "He was going to, shoot Carol, and use a knife on me and Silk. He's got a busted jaw coming."

"Later on. Get him quietly. No one must have the vaguest notion that Pixie has been kidnapped. Hold him somewhere until tomorrow morning, then stow him in the ice-box of Silk's new grocery store."

"Is Silk quitting?" Butch asked.

"No—not at all. This store will receive certain Black Market goods tomorrow. When they arrive, you will do your part, Butch, and it includes slugging a couple of guys."

"Lead me to it!" Butch said grimly. "I've been aching to plaster a few of these birds."

"Now listen closely, Butch," Quinn said earnestly. "Your duties are simple, but of the utmost importance. Come through, and we'll smoke out the leader of the Black Market locate his stock and put an end to him for good."

Butch listened attentively and his grin grew broader and broader. This was work exactly to his liking. Carol also received orders.

"We'll all be in it tomorrow," Quinn assured. "If we put on the proper amount of pressure, things are bound to happen. Now get busy, Butch. See Silk first as I told you. Then get Pixie and if he doesn't show up at the doctor, or you can't find him, phone me. I'll give you the name of another member of the outfit. I think I can guess who the ringleaders are. Every one will be an ex-bootlegger."

"I'd like to find Fraser." Butch walked toward the door. "He's the principal rat I want."

"First lieutenant would be a better description," Quinn said. "Right now, we've got to let him alone, because he'd spill the beans for us if he disappeared. It would be guessed we had him."

THE next morning Silk opened up his new grocery store. But he didn't look like Silk Kirby. He seemed stouter, because of some skillful padding, and he had white hair, ruddy cheeks and a pompous manner.

Silk gave a start of surprise when he walked into his back room. Butch was there, toasting a steak in a pot-bellied stove. There was a pile of bones on the floor, well gnawed.

"A man couldn't ask for a better spot to spend the night," Butch said, and grinned.

His hair had been colored red and was touseled. There were a few freckles on his face, which had become a couple of shades lighter.

A flimsy disguise, but Butch and the Black Bat both hoped he wouldn't come into contact with any of the crooks who had already seen him—except Pixie Pax.

"I saved the bones for Gwendolyn," Butch said. "Say, she ought to take to you good and strong. Imagine being a dog and having your own master own a meat market?"

"And have his friends horn in and eat up the profits," Silk grumbled. "Is everything set?"

"Shipshape. There's a side of beef in your cooler. It's got two legs and one arm and it looks like a human being. Don't slice him with a meat hook even though he's got it coming!'

Silk slipped into an apron and went into the front of the store. He cleaned the butcher block, the counter, then began filling them with cold cuts. Finally, he stepped into the cooler. He heard chattering teeth, and Pixie Pax looked up at him mournfully.

"Warm enough?" Silk asked pleasantly. "That's fine. Freezing is good for a man's soul at times, especially the soul of a hot shot like you."

Silk carried out a quarter of beef and went to work on it. He didn't know one cut from another and hoped none of his customers would notice the difference. When they did start to enter, however, Silk had practiced long enough to give a fairly good performance.

Business was not exactly rushing. It seemed that Hawkes hadn't sold the store only because he was afraid of the Black Market men. Butch slumbered fitfully in the back room, but came to attention every time the front door opened.

The morning went by and the afternoon. It was dark when a light truck pulled up in front of the store and two men got out of it. They swaggered in, and Silk gave them a properly worried look.

"Are you Hawkes?" one of them demanded.

"No—Mr. Hawkes sold me the store yesterday. What do you want?"

The pair looked at one another, then seemed satisfied to go ahead. The spokesman leaned across the counter.

"If anybody comes in, I'll stop talking. Otherwise, you listen, get it? Outside, we have a hundred and fifty pounds of choice canned hams. Hawkes contracted to buy them and you'll pay. Now don't start jabbering. The stuff is worth the money."

"How much?" Silk asked breathlessly.

The crook named a price that made Silk blink in amazement.

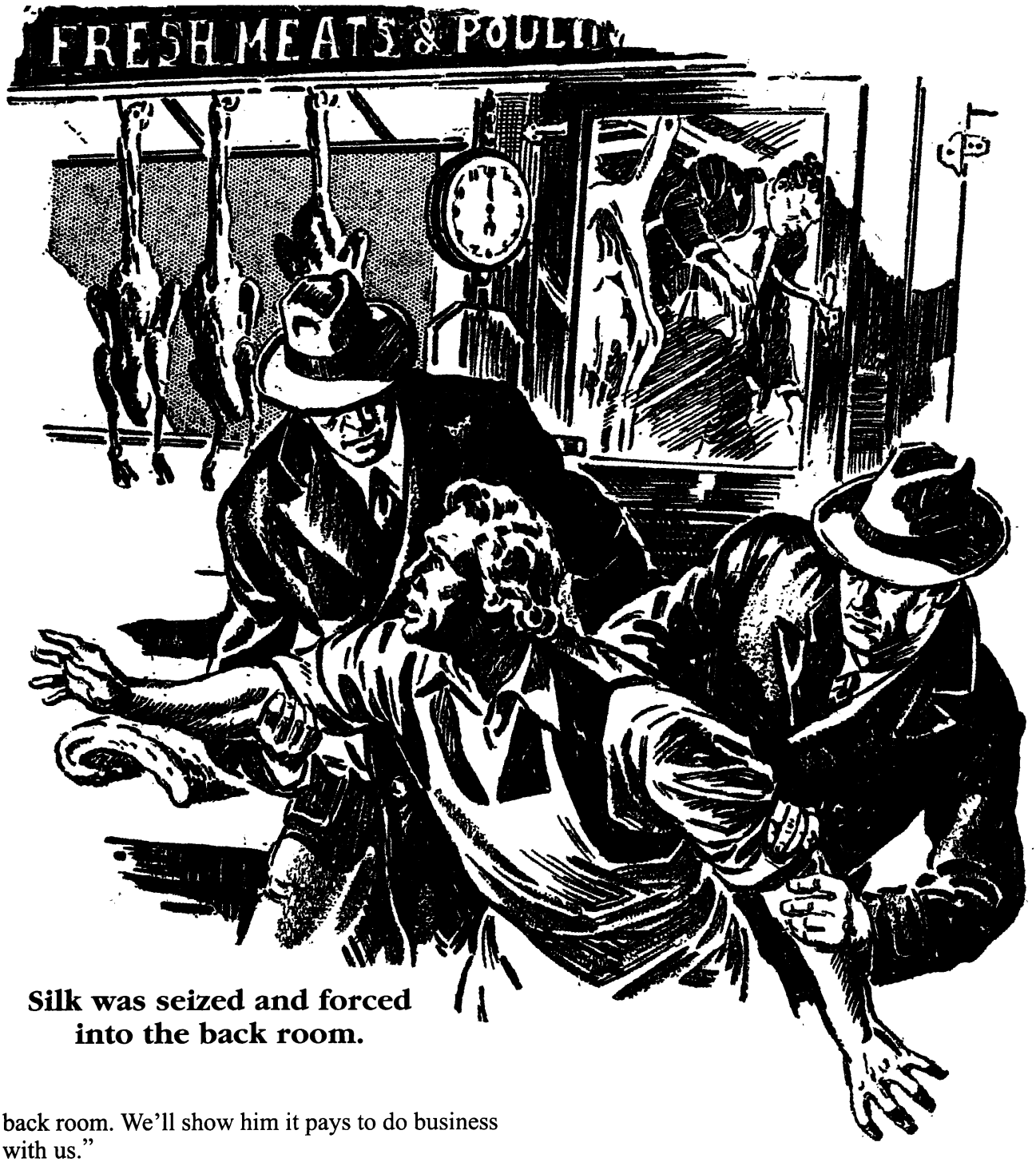
"Listen, mister," the crook said. "Sure it's high. But you can sell them to people with money enough to pay your price. Even with rationing books, canned hams ain't easy to get and these are choice. Confidentially, they were meant for the Army."

"What if—if I refuse them?" Silk quavered. "If I wish nothing to do with this business?"

The crook smiled crookedly. "Then you buy 'em anyhow and we muss up your store and you. It won't be nice, and next time we'll be even harder on you. Now be sensible. The stuff can't be traced. You make money on it and so do we. Why in no time at all we'll provide you with anything the customers want. And I mean anything from coffee and sugar right up to whole sides of beef."

"No," Silk said, "I do not think I will do business with you."

"Lock the door." The crook glanced at his companion. "Then help me drag this guy into the



Silk was seized and forced into the back room.

back room. We'll show him it pays to do business with us."

WHEN the door was locked, both men seized Silk and he was forced into the back room. Suddenly, they let go. Silk almost fell. He got out of the way fast because Butch was advancing and his face was a mask of hatred.

"I heard it all!" Butch bellowed. "Every word, I got this region sewed up for myself and my boss. Guys like you horn in and there'll be trouble."

Butch leaped forward. The two astounded crooks did their best to get out of the way, but Butch's big hands reached faster. He grasped them by their collars and brought their heads together with a resounding crack. He let go and they slumped to the floor.

Butch wiped his hands. "Too bad there weren't more. Are you all set, Silk?"

"All set," Silk said. "Remember what to do. A certain party wants a good look at that truck for one thing. You know where to meet him."

Butch walked into the cooler and came out with the shivering Pixie tucked under one arm. Butch unlocked the front door and stood there with Pixie at his side. When Silk raised his hand in a signal, Butch hustled Pixie out to the sidewalk.

Then Silk hurried into the front of the store, followed by the two crooks. The light from the windows, even dimmed out as they were, illuminated Butch and Pixie as they passed. Pixie

climbed into the truck. At least, it seemed that way, although Butch's hand had a lot to do with it. Then Butch got aboard, started the motor and the truck rolled away.

"Pixie!" one of the crooks growled. "He's double-croseing us."

He turned to Silk who had backed against the counter and assumed a thoroughly frightened attitude.

"What kind of a frame was that?" he demanded.

"I—I couldn't help it," Silk replied nervously. "That—that big redhead came in here. He said you'd arrive. Then another man came—he had one arm in a sling. They went into the back room to wait. They told me if I said a word about them being here they'd kill me and you too. I—I was trying to save our lives."

"Get on the phone," one of the men ordered the other. "Pixie and that new helper of his hijacked our truck and it was loaded. He'll peddle the stuff and collect. He thinks we don't know, because Pixie stayed out of sight while that big gorilla jumped us."

The other thug picked up the phone in Silk's back room and dialed. Then he spoke in a voice too low for Silk to hear a word. When he came out, he just nodded.

The other Black Market agent gave Silk a warning.

"You'll buy from us, understand? And keep your mouth shut about this if you want to live. No complaints to the cops or the rationing boards. Remember—it's your life, and maybe we'll even look up your family."

They went out promptly, cursed at a lack of transportation and started walking east. A pretty girl who had been staring in the windows of another store down the street walked in the same direction. Those two were never out of her sight.

They crossed town by bus and the girl rode with them. Near one of the best residential sections they got off, stopped at a corner and seemed to be waiting.

A FEW moments later, Fraser came walking along. The three talked earnestly for a time, then Fraser went in one direction, the two men in another.

Carol Baldwin followed Fraser. He was the one most likely to contact the man behind this Black Market. Her heart pounded as she recognized the section. He was heading for Reggie Archer's house. That could mean they were bound for Tyler's place because it was directly behind Archer's.

A car rolled down the street. Fraser stopped, and when the car slowed up, he ran into the road and boarded it. The streets were poorly lighted and the tail light of the car was conveniently dark. Carol couldn't see any part of the number plate.

CHAPTER XV
Clues to a Killer

HUGE, hard-boiled Butch rolled his newly acquired truck into a large public park, drove around and kept glancing, at his watch. He passed by a fountain, continued on for exactly half a mile according to the speedometer, then stopped.

He looked at Pixie and grinned.

"Still don't feel like talking, pal? Well, how'd you like to know that all those rats associated with you are already looking for holes to run into? But you been a big help, so you don't have to worry about any rat-hole. We got one all ready for you—with bars on the window and the door."

Pixie seemed ready to explode, but he maintained a rigid silence.

Someone opened the rear door of the truck. Butch didn't move. There was more fussing around the back of the truck, then a solid slap was heard against a rear fender. Butch started the motor.

As he pulled away, the Black Bat darted into the shadows. Once there, he opened an envelope in his hand and looked at the fine particles of shiny substance in it. He had removed these from the rear tires of the truck. His eyes needed no light to study them, but he determined to make a more careful check.

He moved around the bend to where Butch's coupé was parked, slipped behind the wheel, removed his hood and put on the large hat. He turned out of the park and drove home.

Carol was waiting in the laboratory. She made a detailed report about how Fraser had met the men by appointment, then had been picked up in a car she couldn't identify.

"I never got the slightest glimpse of the driver, Tony," she said. "The dim-out doesn't help our work too much."

The Black Bat nodded. "Fraser most certainly was picked up by that man he works for. Now if Butch does his part, we'll have them on the run tonight."

The Black Bat carefully spilled the tiny particles of hard substance onto a glass slide and placed them beneath the low power of a microscope. He bent over it and grunted.

"What is it, Tony?" Carol asked.

"Bits of metal. The truck Butch hijacked had been near some factory loading platform. A factory where a lot of metal shavings are probably

returned to a smelting plant. Some of it falls to the ground and the truck tires picked it up."

"Stevenson's place?" Carol asked.

"Might be. Reggie Archer works there, and he has previously proved himself a man to whom money is a god. And Archer actually going to work— hard work—is suspicious in itself unless a sudden wave of patriotism has swept over him. Carol, this Black Market isn't just a menace to our economic interests or a detriment to the war effort, it's dangerous as well."

"Yes, Tony?" she asked. "I don't quite understand..."

"That truck Butch seized, for instance. It was loaded with fresh meat. None of it was covered. The truck was filthy, not refrigerated. Do you think those punks care for that? And if they handle fresh meat that way, Carol, I shudder to think of how they'd take care of dairy products. Milk for children and invalids."

"They're a pretty rotten bunch," Carol commented. "I'm betting they start to dilute coffee with cheap substitutes, mix butter with inedible fats, switch labels on cans of food to sell the cheapest brand at the highest prices."

"You're right, of course," the Black Bat said. "These men did the same thing during Prohibition. The younger ones even, will soon remember that bathtub gin used to be sold as imported stuff and they'll apply this to food. They won't give a hoot what they sell ... Were you able to find out who was at Archer's party?"

"Yes. Lee Tyler was there. But no one else we are interested in so far as I can learn."

THE BLACK BAT arose and paced the floor.

"Everything depends upon this trick we're trying to put over now, Carol," he said. "We must make their leader believe another gang is moving in, and that one of his own men, Pixie, has joined the ranks of this new crowd. I'm waiting to hear from Butch. He's out with that truck and Pixie, selling the Black Market stuff and leaving a wide open trail behind him."

A sudden crash made Carol jump to her feet in alarm. The Black Bat laughed.

"Think nothing of it, darling. Silk is home from his career as a storekeeper and he's romping with Gwendolyn. Silk has something up his sleeve too. He's most secretive all of a sudden, but I've a feeling Gwendolyn has a major part in his plans."

A red bulb began to wink. That meant that Silk was switching a telephone call to the lab. The Black Bat murmured a greeting into the phone and listened to Butch report. When he hung up, he was smiling.

"That may do it, Carol," he said. "Butch sold some of the stuff to places actively dealing in Black Market goods. He left the idea that they'd get a large amount of goods tomorrow, and cheap, too. Those men will contact Fraser or some of his stooges and pass the word along."

"And then what happens?" Carol asked,

"Fraser and his boss can assume only one thing. That Pixie has discovered where their cache of supplies are hidden and intends to help this new gang get them. Butch made certain Pixie was plainly seen whenever they stopped. Well, it's time for me to be moving."

Carol picked up her purse and gloves. "I'm going too."

The Black Bat stepped close to her. "No, Carol. This time there's bound to be trouble. You have done your share. Some of the crooks would recognize you immediately and the whole thing would be thrown off. Stay here, and I'll keep in touch with you."

Carol sat down again. "All right, Tony. Where are you going?"

"First, to clarify my own mind in connection with the suspects I have under consideration. Lee Tyler is one. So is Archer—Stevenson too. Later on, I'll try to find their hidden supplies. If you want anything, call Silk."

He smiled at her, descended into the tunnel and reached the parked car. Driving to the vicinity of Lee Tyler's house which was lighted, he parked and waited until a couple of pedestrians walked past.

The Black Bat adjusted the hood, made his way to the front door and listened. His extraordinary hearing detected no sounds of conversation, and only one set of footsteps moving about. Apparently, the servants were gone for the day—he had discovered they did not live in the house—and Tyler was alone. The gambler soon would be getting ready to start for his gambling places.

The Black Bat touched the bell button and moved silently back until shadows concealed him. The door opened and Tyler peered out. He frowned because he could see no one and began to close the door.

"Do you mind if I come in?" the Black Bat asked, and stepped into view.

LEE TYLER'S gambler nerves held fast. He smiled a greeting, stepped aside, and closed the door quickly after the Black Bat went by. The Black Bat dropped into a chair in the living room.

"I'm out for showdowns tonight, Tyler," he said. "You are first on my list. I happen to know that your garage—or the playroom above it—has been used as the meeting place for a Black Market ring. Were you aware of it?"

"No." Tyler masked his face by lighting a cigarette. He slowly put the lighter back on a table and looked down at the Black Bat. "I own three cars. Since the fuel shortage became so acute, I laid them all up. I don't even hold gasoline ration cards and I haven't been inside my garage in a month. These days garages are deserted spots."

"Directly behind your property is the home of Reggie Archer," said the Black Bat. "He could easily arrange to use your garage as a meeting place. What do you think of him, Tyler?"

"What any decent man thinks of a rat," Tyler growled. "Archer accepted graft. I understand he has reformed, but that remains to be seen. Some days ago, Archer gave a Victory Ball, open to the public, but the prices were high enough to keep out anyone except people he wanted to come."

The Black Bat leaned forward, "Did you see Russ Bowman there?"

"Yes—and I have assumed that Russ did not commit suicide." The gambler's jaw tightened grimly. "He was murdered and the whole plan for that began at Archer's party. Some of Archer's guests were amazing. I counted at least half a dozen ex-bootleggers. Naturally, I wondered what was up, so I watched them. They disappeared, one by one. Not all came back. It's sure Bowman did not. Shortly afterwards, all of them left the party."

"I know some of those details," the Black Bat said, "and they are quite true. You have proved you have nothing to hide. However, the night I first visited you, I watched you leave your swankiest gambling place and—"

Tyler's cigarette hung limply between his lips and he seemed a little paler.

"Just what did you place in that mailbox which was later on picked up by two men?" the Black Bat asked bluntly.

Tyler threw away his cigarette and shrugged.

"I might have known it couldn't last," he said. "I'm glad you were the one to discover it though. This is the truth, Black Bat. I'm afraid of being held up. Every crook in town knows I take in a lot of cash every night. I wouldn't dare leave it behind, in an office safe. Therefore, I put it all into an envelope and mail it, long after any collections are made or scheduled to be made. Two of my men have a key for the box. They take it away."

"I see. It's a clever idea, Tyler. Perhaps the postal authorities wouldn't like it, but so long as no other mail was touched, they'd never know. I believe you. Thanks for being so honest."

"Being honest is my stock-in-trade, Black Bat," Tyler said. "Sounds funny coming from a gambler, doesn't it? But it's true. I've already stopped using that mailbox. I foolishly thought it was a smart idea."

The Black Bat left Tyler's home, went to the rear of it and skirted the garage. He made certain none of Fraser's men were hidden around the place or that a meeting was going on. When he reached Reggie Archer's garage, he found it locked, but his keys mastered the lock and he stepped inside.

ARCHER had two cars—a coupé and a heavy sedan. Neither car carried any gasoline rationing stickers on the windshield, and they showed no indications of having been used recently.

The Black Bat locked up behind him and was half-way toward the big Archer house when a back door opened and closed. His eyes penetrated the darkness to watch a man hurry toward the garage. It was Reggie Archer.

He passed a dozen feet from where the Black Bat was hidden and his face was set in grim, worried lines. He opened the big garage doors, climbed into a car and stepped on the starter. The motor was cold and stiff. It took him four or five minutes to get the car started.

Meanwhile, the Black Bat quietly faded out of sight. At a safe distance he broke into a run.

When Archer drove away, the Black Bat was in his own coupé and ready to follow.

Archer's actions were highly suspicious and the Black Bat had a well-grounded idea that this was the beginning of the final phase. Now, if Butch only came through ...

Only a short time before Butch had piloted the light truck he had purloined away from his last customer. The truck was empty and Butch's pockets were fat with money which would eventually be turned over to the war effort.

Most of all though, Butch had the satisfaction of having done a hard job well. At each place, the merchant had seen Pixie. Word of that would soon reach Fraser and the mystery man behind him. Butch stopped to make a phone call from an outlying drugstore. He spoke to Carol on the phone and told her to inform the Black Bat as soon as he called that everything had worked splendidly. Then, heading for the door, Butch saw a car pull to the curb in front of the truck and Fraser got out. He was apparently alone.

Fraser yanked the truck door open, saw Pixie seated there and drew a gun.

"So I finally caught up with you!" he snarled, "Pixie, this is the finish. You know better than to double-cross me. Why don't you say something?"

Pixie half raised his good arm as if to ward off the impending bullet, but didn't say a word.

His cheek muscles worked, but his lips remained sealed. He had seen Butch, though Fraser had not. The gangster was in no trifling mood.

"I should have knocked you off long ago," Fraser said curtly. "You always were a dumb, double-crossing fool. I'm taking care of it right now."

The gun rose to center on Pixie's chest. The ex-bootlegger began squirming and waving his good arm in protest. Fraser mistook that for terror, decided Pixie couldn't speak because fear froze his vocal cords. His finger tightened on the trigger.

Suddenly, then, things went blank for Fraser. He felt a terrific blow against the back of his neck. The gun fell from his hand and he sagged toward the running board.

Butch threw him into the back of the truck. Fraser would give no trouble for a few minutes, and by that time Butch could have the truck in an isolated section where Fraser might be properly cared for in private. It would be no tea party.

CHAPTER XVI
Metal Monster

REACHING a desolate section, Butch stopped. Fraser was groaning in the back of the truck, but was not yet fully conscious. Butch grinned at Pixie.

"I heard your swell pal saying he was ready to knock you off. Want to talk, Pixie?"

Pixie moved his head up and down fast. Butch's grin spread. He pushed Pixie back againat the seat, got two fingers between his lips and opened his jaws. He worked loose a prize fighter's rubber mouthpiece that had clamped Pixie's tongue down tightly. Nor had Pixie dared all day to touch it, with Butch watching.

Pixie worked his jaws violently, and kicked at the mouthpiece on the floor board.

"I'm listening," Butch said. "If you don't want to talk, I can stick that thing back in your mouth. That's one trick you birds never thought of. I've kept you around all day and you never said a word. By looking at you, nobody could guess you were gagged. Come on— talk."

"What—what do you want to know?" Pixie croaked.

"Where is all the stuff kept? You know what I mean. Listen, Pixie, I just moved in on you guys. Cooperate or I'll handle the whole thing myself and you'll be out in the cold. I'm after the big stuff. It's hidden somewhere, and you know where!"

Fraser wriggled forward, raising himself slightly. There was no partition between the front seat, and the body of the truck. Butch twisted around.

"Pixie," Fraser said, "you've been made a monkey of. This guy works for the Black Bat. If you talk, so help me I'll tell about Bowman! That'll take care of you."

Butch grabbed Fraser by one arm and dragged him closer. He raised a fist, smashed it home and Fraser passed out again.

"And that," Butch said, "takes care of you. Accusing my pal Pixie of a murder! Just goes to show what a rat will do when cornered. How about it, Pixie? Do we join forces or shall I drop the two of you off at Police Headquarters where Fraser can sing his fool head off?"

"You—you'll find the stuff in—a factory. It's run by a guy named Stevenson, but I'm not sure if he knows anything about what's going on. That's the truth!"

"I believe you all right," Butch said, "but I think you ought to join your pal in back because, I'm apt to be a busy guy in a little while. I hate to do this to a guy with only one flipper, but it can't be helped."

Butch had drawn back one fist, trying to calculate just how much steam to put behind it. But when he recalled that Fraser had accused Pixie of murdering Russ Bowman, Butch didn't temper his strength much. In a moment, Butch was rapidly heading for Fred Stevenson's factory.

It was after midnight. The last shift had gone home and no employees would be around until about six. The whole factory was in darkness. Wondering if Pixie had lied to him, Butch growled in anger.

After making certain neither man could escape, Butch left the truck and approached the factory cautiously. A car, driven without light, was coming down the road. Butch dropped flat. It stopped and a man got out. Butch recognized him. It was Reggie Archer.

ARCHER ran across a cleared space to the big loading platform. Butch saw him clamber onto it, crawl on hands and knees toward a door, then stand up for a moment while he let himself in. Butch started forward, wondering where the Black Bat was.

A hissing sound made him duck. It came again and Butch grinned. He moved in the direction of the sound and discovered the Black Bat hidden behind a clump of trees. Not a sound could be heard. The factory was well out of the city. There wasn't even a house in the neighborhood.

"I figured you'd be around here some place," Butch whispered. "Did you see Archer sneak into the plant? Hey, there's your big-shot! I almost nabbed him, but I guess I had enough luck for one day."

"I trailed Archer here," the Black Bat whispered back, "He certainly acts suspiciously. Butch, I'm fairly sure the Black Market cache is hidden in that factory somewhere."

"I know it is," Butch told him. "Pixie said so, just before I popped him. He and Fraser are sleeping off a punch jag in the back of the truck. Fraser accused Pixie of killing Russ Bowman."

"Under Fraser's orders, probably," the Black Bat said. "That takes care of those two, I'll have McGrath come out and pick them up, but now we've got to get inside the factory. Let me go first I'll wave my arm and try to cover you in case things happen. Make for the same spot where Archer entered."

The Black Bat was hardly visible in his black clothing as he sped toward the plant without a sound. Stones and debris which might have tripped another man, were plainly visible to him. He clambered onto the platform, listened, then signaled Butch.

The huge man was astonishingly quiet in his approach and in moments he joined the Black Bat on the platform. The Bat examined the door, selected a key from those he carried and had it open quickly. Now they could hear faint sounds as if men were working in great haste.

As they slipped inside, closing the door behind them, the big production line was spread out before them. Machines were close together, a wide passage ran along the center of the room. At the far end was an overhead crane, its cage high up, chain and hook dangling from a mighty arm.

Butch and the Black Bat crouched behind one of the big machines. Tbe Bat put his lips against Butch's ear.

"Look at the east wall. Lights! Stevenson told me he was developing some new war devices behind that wall. There are two guards on duty. We've got to get them first, and without making any noise. Ready?"

"Sure," Butch doubled his fists. "Give me the one on the right. Then we'll go in and drag Archer out, huh?"

They crept forward on hands and knees, getting closer and closer to the pair of uniformed men who stood stolidly beside the door. The Black Bat suddenly touched Butch's arm, and Butch looked at the spot to which the Black Bat pointed.

An indistinct hulk lay sprawled out. Butch couldn't make up his mind what it was, but the Black Bat could see every feature of the man who lay there.

"Reggie Archer—dead," he said. "Head smashed. We'll have someone else to drag out."

"Stevenson," Butch whispered.

"Of course, Archer must have been on the level after all. He probably suspected what was going on and came to investigate. They got him. Remember—that's what you'll look like if we slip. Now let's get those guards."

THEY separated and wriggled closer. One guard had a fleeting glimpse of a giant bearing down on him. The other saw nothing at all. Both men were seized around the neck and instantly raised off the floor so their struggles would make no noise.

Butch's man passed out first. A moment later, the Black Bat eased his victim to the floor. They approached the open door then. The Black Bat touched Butch's arm again, and they stood erect and surveyed the whole place.

His acute ears bad picked up the sound of clanking metal, a faint sound only. He saw nothing, shrugged and headed for the door behind which Stevenson was supposed to have men working on a secret war device.

The Black Bat peered into the room. It was huge. Four big machines were placed to act as a shield in case one should happen to get a glimpse during a moment the door was open. Those machines undoubtedly were kept going all day to give the impression that the men in the room were working at top speed.

Behind these machines were cases of goods. Hundreds of them. Stolen or illegally purchased staples, and in sufficient numbers to create a shortage on local markets.

Four men, all of whom the Black Bat recognized aa former bootleggers, were busily engaged in shifting the cases closer to a double door. Apparently, trucks would soon roll up to get the cache away before daybreak.

"Take one of my guns," the Black Bat whispered to Butch. "Sneak out to the platform and cover those double doors. If anyone tries to come out, shoot—and don't miss. There are only two exits from this room—and not a window. If you keep them from leaving via the platform door, I can take care of this one. It's made of steel and locks on the outside. If I can get that door closed, they'll be trapped. I'll give you five miautes before I start things humming."

Butch crawled away. The Black Bat kept his ayes on his watch. He was worried though, about that strange metallic sound he had heard. Yet everything was as quiet as a graveyard except for the sounds of the workers in that room.

When five minutes had elapsed, the Black Bat stood erect and slid along the wall toward the door. He closed it as quietly as possible.

Someone inside let out a yell. A gun cracked, but the bullet pinged off the steel door. The Black Bat jammed the lock of the door with waste in case someone inside had another key.

A gun barked on the loading platform. That would be Butch. Those Black Market agents were securely trapped.

The Black Bat knew where a wall phone was located and ran to it. He had started to dial when the roar of a gun almost shattered his eardrums. In this big, silent room it made a terrific din. The bullet hit the wall three or four inches from the Black Bat's head. He droppcd the receiver and let himself fall to the floor.

The gun cracked again, but this time the slug went wide of its mark. Wherever that killer lurked, he was handicapped by darkness. Only for another instant though. Suddenly, the whole factory was flooded with bright light.

The Black Bat crawled beneath a machine, drew his second gun and tried to figure out where the killer wss hidden. He wriggled toward the wide aisle between the machines. The killer fired again and this time came dangerously close.

FLAT on the floor, the Black Bat peered up at the big steel car from which the crane arm projected. Those slugs bad been fired with a downward slant. The only place the gunman could be was up in that cab.

The Black Bat caught a glimpse of shiny steel, saw an arm protrude from the cab window. His gun blazed and the arm was hastily withdrawn, The heavy cab began to move, trundling along on its big tracks. Its arm swung out to get in line with the machine under which the Black Bat was crouched. The thick chain and the quarter-ton hook started swinging into position.

The hook hit the machine a glancing blow, causing it to wobble badly, and sparks flew as metal scraped metal in a mighty impact. The hook swung again, lower this time. If it hit the Black Bat, he would be crushed to death.

Rolling over twice, he got out of the way. The hook struck the machine and almost tipped over. More manipulations of the crane and that hook gripped the under part of the machine, tore it loose from the floor and raised it about fifteen feet.

The giant arm started swinging again, as if rearching for the Black Bat. With a jerk, the hook slipped free and the machine crashed down. Pieces of metal struck the Black Bat, bringing an involuntary cry of pain from his lips.

He fired at the cab, but it was like shooting at a modern tank with a pop-gun. The man inside was safe, and knew it.

The hook descended and swung viciously at where the Black Bat was hidden. The killer had a bird's eye view of the floor and it was virtually impossible for the Black Bat to get out of sight.

He dodged the murderous hook, saw it smash another machine, then he dived wildly into the cleared space. The hook lowered and swung again. It whistled past the Black Bat's head. The killer fired at him, but missed because the Black Bat was moving fast, until he was directly below the bottom of the solid cab.

Here was the only blind spot to the murderous operator. The crane arm moved, seeking him out. The cab stopped moving. So did the Black Bat. Apparently, the killer was puzzled, yet he didn't want to risk sticking his head out of the cab window.

Finally, he was compelled to. The Black Bat was ready and his gun roared twice. But the man had caught a glimpse of the Black Bat's shadow just in time, and ducked back.

The cab rolled forward, hook swinging crazily. It stopped short and reversed directions. So did the Black Bat, always careful to remain directly beneath it.

The cab stopped dead. The crane lowered a trifle and steel cables hissed as the hook dropped almost to the floor. Then it began swinging once more and with each one of the swings, the Black Bat shuddered. The operator could manipulate the hook so it would clear anything from below the cab.

It whizzed toward him and the Black Bat dropped flat. The hook passed no more than six inches above his prone body, came back and dropped another inch or two.

THIS couldn't go on. The Black Bat knew that in the end he would lose this battle. Against the steel monster, he was impotent. Somehow he had to put out those lights.

He scooted from beneath the cab and fired one shot at it. Then he slid below the machines. The great hook instantly swung in his direction and the crane arm went up. The Black Bat took advantage of these few seconds' grace to worm his way as rapidly as possible between the machines.

The killer fired and the bullet glanced off a machine, lost most of its power and barely penetrated the Black Bat's clothing. The sting of it lent wings to his feet, however.

The cab was rolling after him, down that cleared passageway, and the arm swung out to drop that hook at exactly the right time. The Black Bat reached the end of the room where he had already spotted the switch-box, but to his horror, it was locked. And he would have no time to open it.

The hook would crush him in a second!

CHAPTER XVII
Gwendolyn—Happy Hunter

JUST below the big switch-box heavy cables were anchored to the wall. The Black Bat crouched near them.

The killer was moving the hook into position for another slashing swing at him. Like a gigantic pendulum, it began to gain speed as it swung in wider and wider arcs. It struck the machine beside which the Black Bat squatted and the machine almost tipped over. Now the hook was coming back.

The Black Bat leaped to one side, was missed by the hook by a dangerous margin, then it was caught in some of the machinery. Not for long though. The cables whirred and the hook lifted another machine off the floor. This was dropped with a crash, close to where the Black Bat stood.

The hook started its lethal swing again. The killer wasn't bothering to use his gun now. The hook could do the job better. The Black Bat saw it coming and braced himself. If he failed now, he would die instantly.

The hook's speed was terrific. The Black Bat stepped two paces to one side and, as the hook swung past, he dived for it, gripped the thing and swung with it toward the wall.

He maneuvered to be on the inside when it struck. Chunks of brick were knocked down. The Black Bat's feet slithered across the floor as a brake. He slid the hook under those cables and flung himself to the floor.

A crash, followed by bluish lightning, and the factory was blacked out as the cables were ripped free. The gigantic hook swung back somewhat limply. The Black Bat seized it. The links of the chain were large enough to secure a toe grip and he rapidly climbed it to the end of the crane arm.

Slowly then, the Black Bat slid down the slanted arm, facing the cab and holding his gun ready.

Within a dozen yards of the cab, he checked his descent. Through the utter darkness his eyes could make out the killer, moving from one window to another in the cab, confused by the darkness.

"Stevenson," the Black Bat shouted, "throw your gun out of the cab or be killed!"

His answer was the flame of Stevenson's pistol. Almost before the flash died away, the Black Bat's gun was exploding. He heard a scream, then moans. Finally, a voice reached him, weak and shaky.

"You won't take me alive. Not me!"

Then the Black Bat saw a dark form go hurtling down from the cab. It hit the cement floor below with a horrible squishing sound. The Black Bat slid back to the floor and ran over to the telephone.

TONY QUINN, dressed in tweeds and smoking his pipe, sat in front of the fireplace in his study. Silk moved about the room and neither showed any signs of fatigue.

Cars stopped in front and many feet pounded across the porch. Silk opened the door and let Captain McGrath, four detectives and two prisoners inside.

McGrath seized Silk's arm.

"Listen, you, one word about these two monkeys I've got handcuffed and I'll make you sorry! Stay in the background understand?"

"Yes, sir," Silk said docilely. "Of course, sir."

McGrath motioned his men and the two prisoners not to move. Then he walked noisily into the library.

"Ah, Captain," Quinn said, "I'm glad you've come. Something I want to talk over. Matter of fact, I was just debating whether or not to phone you."

"You phoned me already," McGrath snapped. "You used the name of the Black Bat and I got myself a nice haul of prisoners and a couple of dead men. You were in Stevenson's factory tonight!"

"I? Oh, but you're wrong, Captain. I've been thinking of Mr. Stevenson though. Please sit down and hear what I have thought out."

McGrath sat down on the edge of a chair as if ready to jump up and clamp handcuffs around Tony Quinn's wrists any minute.

"Commissioner Warner talked to me about this Black Market," Quinn said pleasantly. "Now, I'm chairman of a rationing board and it's my job to help destroy any such Black Market. Mr. Stevenson made me a strange proposal at one of our meetings. He suggested that employees of large factories be instructed to write letters, anonymously, telling about merchants who deal in Black Market goods."

"I'm more interested in the Black Bat," McGrath said. "But go ahead."

"Well, Stevenson had tried out the plan himself and obtained a number of these anonymous complaints which were turned over to us. Those I received I carefully checked myself.

"I discovered that the merchants in questibn were not selling Black Market goods, but had been approached by representatives of such an organization and had all but thrown them out of their stores.

"It seemed to me that whoever wrote those complaints was trying to make trouble for these merchants. I put a few things together and reasoned that perhaps some of Stevenson's employees were

part of the Black Market gang. Do you follow me, Captain?"

"You'd be surprised how far I am ahead of you," growled McGrath. "Keep talking."

"I wondered then if Mr. Stevenson could possibly have written those complaints himself. It would have been easy to do.

"I talked to people who knew Stevenson. He has always been money-mad. When the war began, he plunged into manufacturing supplies with an amazing vigor. That tapered off when he discovered his profits were limited.

"Next I visited Stevenson's factory. Now we all know that the Black Market must have some safe spot in which to keep supplies, Stevenson has a room in his factory which is well guarded. No one is permitted inside. He claims he is building some new type of war device there.

"I happen to know he lies. Metals are scrupulously rationed these days. Stevenson gets just enough to operate his regular business and, weight by weight his supply is accounted for in products. Therefore, how does he get the materials for this new device?"

"Pretty smart," McGrath smirked. "Anything else?"

QUINN nodded, and smiled.

"Commissioner Warner also informed me that Lee Tyler, the gambler, and Reggie Archer, were suspected. In only trying to help, Captain, I discovered that Tyler and Archer had both put their cars up to conserve fuel. Stevenson had not. In fact, he asked for and received rationing cards; whlch allowed him to purchase all the gasoline he wanted for his private cars. That is an indication of his true thoughts about rationing. He used those cards to the limit.

"Of course it isn't much to go by, but I think Stevenson should be thoroughly investigated. Especially that room at his factory."

"That's just swell," McGrath derided. "It so happens, Quinn, that Stevenson is dead. He had a fight with the Black Bat and lost. Reggie Archer is dead, too—murdered by Stevenson. We found the biggest Black Market cache you ever saw in the factory. We got the men involved and they talked their fool heads off. Everything is clear now except for one thing. Who is the Black Bat?"

"Who?" Quinn asked innocently.

McGrath turned red. "In one minute, I'll tell you. I'vç got two punks here. Both of them saw the Black Bat and I think they'll recognize you. Enough to let me pinch you and have those eyes examined once more so I'll know I couldn't have been tricked. Men—bring those rats here."

Fraser and Pixie, eyeing one another malevolently, were hustled into the room.

"Quinn, stand up." ordered McGrath. "You, Fraser, does he look like the guy you saw wearing a hood?"

"Him?" Fraser stared. "No. The Black Bat is a tall guy, skinny, too. Nope, I wouldn't say this man is the Black Bat."

"How about you?" McGrath snapped at Pixie.

"Aw, no. Fraser is a stupe, He's all wrong. The Black Bat wasn't so big. Kind of chunky, if you ask me, and I had a good look. Nothing like this man. No, sir."

McGrath groaned and.Quinn stifled a smile. Pixie looked at Quinn steadily for a moment.

"Hey—you're Quinn, the old D.A.!" he said suddenly. "You sent me up once, but I ain't sore. You're a smart guy, Mr. Quinn. Maybe you can help me. A certain guy told me we'd ncver get-away with this Black Market business, that things ain't like they were in Prohibition days. He said somebody would fight us with a secret weapon. Something we never heard of, but all I saw was guns. What did he mean, huh? Did he mean the Black Bat? Or was he just goofy?"

"Russ Bowman told him that," McGrath said, half angrily. "He's been raving about it ever since. Secret weapons!"

"Anyhow," Pixie sighed, "the whole thing was a bust. We got the stuff easy, but try and get rid of it. Some of those butchers almost buried cleavers in my skull. They didn't want to sell the stuff and make a lot of money. They tossed us out. We had to start slamming 'em around to make 'em take our stuff. Then two guys I know turned it all over to the Red Cross. Is the whole world nuts?"

"No," Quinn said softly. "The world is waking up. This Russ Bowman knew what he was talking about. He meant that public opinion would be against you, that honest men would have nothing to do with Black Market goods. That was the secret weapon he meant—public opinion. Yes, some men will do anything for a dollar, but there weren't enough of them to provide an outlet for your goods. Russ Bowman was an intelligent person."

"Take these men away," McGrath ordered leave one car out front for me."

McGRATH supervised things until the police car left the curb. Then he came back to face Quinn.

"I almost had you that time. One of these days, so help me—"

"Why, Captain," Quinn said mildly, "I thought our feud was over when you presented me with Gwendolyn. Naturally, you must have been sure I was blind to give me a dog for a guide."

McGrath swallowed hard. Well, I changed my

mind. I still think you're the Black Bat and some da— "

"Nonsense, Captain," Quinn said. "And speaking as a friend, that was a foolish way of trying to prove I'm the Black Bat. Nobody would take the word of those mugs, and they didn't see the Black Bat's face. Doesn't he wear a hood of some kind?"

McGrath opened his mouth to say something, thought better of it, and turned on his heel. He stalked out, passing Silk. But Silk didn't close the door. When McGrath reached a point halfway to the gate, Silk whistled softly.

There was a terrific pounding and Gwendolyn came down the steps with a rush. She bolted through the door. McGrath saw her coming, sensed that things were not quite right and tried to reach his car.

He found that was impossible and fled down the street with Gwczsdolyn rapidly gaining on him.

Tony Quinn came to the door and gave Silk a stern look.

"Just a few moments before McGrath arrived," he said, "1 happened to find some rather strange things in your room, Silk. A derby hat like McGrath's. A fake mustache like his, the same kind of a suit, the same square-toed shoes. What have you heen trying to do? Disguise yourself as McGrath?"

Silk gulped and turned red, "Well, you see, I figured Gwendolyn, was easy to train. If she could be taught to chew up anybody who wore a cape, she could be taught other things too. That's the game we were playing. I figured if she had to hate anybody, McGrath was the best man she could pick on. I... Oh—oh. Here comes Gwendolyn."

The massive dog, tail wagging furioualy, leaped the gate and strutted proudly toward the porch. Between her jaws was Captain McGrath's derby hat, sadly battered into an almost shapeless mass.

She deposited it at Tony Quinn's feet and looked up with those great, pleading eyes of hers as if she wanted a reward.

Quinn patted her head.

"A steak for Gwendolyn, Silk. A steak—right off my ration book."

THE END

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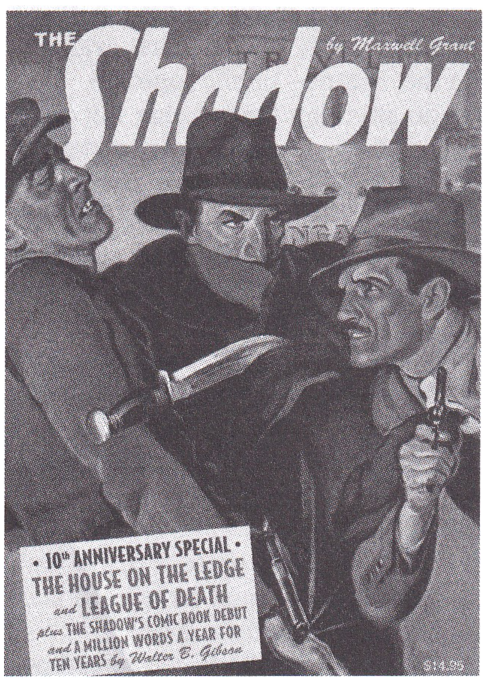

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THE MAN BEHIND THE BLACK BAT

Norman A. Daniels (1905-95) worked as an insurance investigator after studying at Columbia and Northwestern universities. Born Norman Arthur Danberg in Brooklyn, Connecticut, Daniels made his first professional sale to *Gangster Stories* in 1931, receiving $29.75 for "Vapors of Vengeance."

Daniels' breakout year was 1934, when his output jumped to 400,000 words, including fifteen stories for Harry Donenfeld's *Spicy* pulps. During the following decades, the versatile wordsmith produced tales in a wide variety of genres, including science fiction, horror, detective, adventure, sports and love, selling stories to such diverse publications as *G-Men*, *Thrilling Spy Stories*, *Strange Stories*, *Air War*, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and John W. Campbell's *Unknown*.

Working under the "G. Wayman Jones" house name, Daniels created the Black Bat for Standard editor Leo Margulies, and eventually wrote 55 of the 62 Black Bat pulp novels. "Leo asked me to think of something to compete with The Shadow," Daniels explained. "I came up with this character I called the Tiger because in the initial episode, the hero had been doused with acid. His face was lined like a tiger's. He wanted to change the Tiger to the Black Bat because he wanted it to go into *Black Book Detective* magazine."

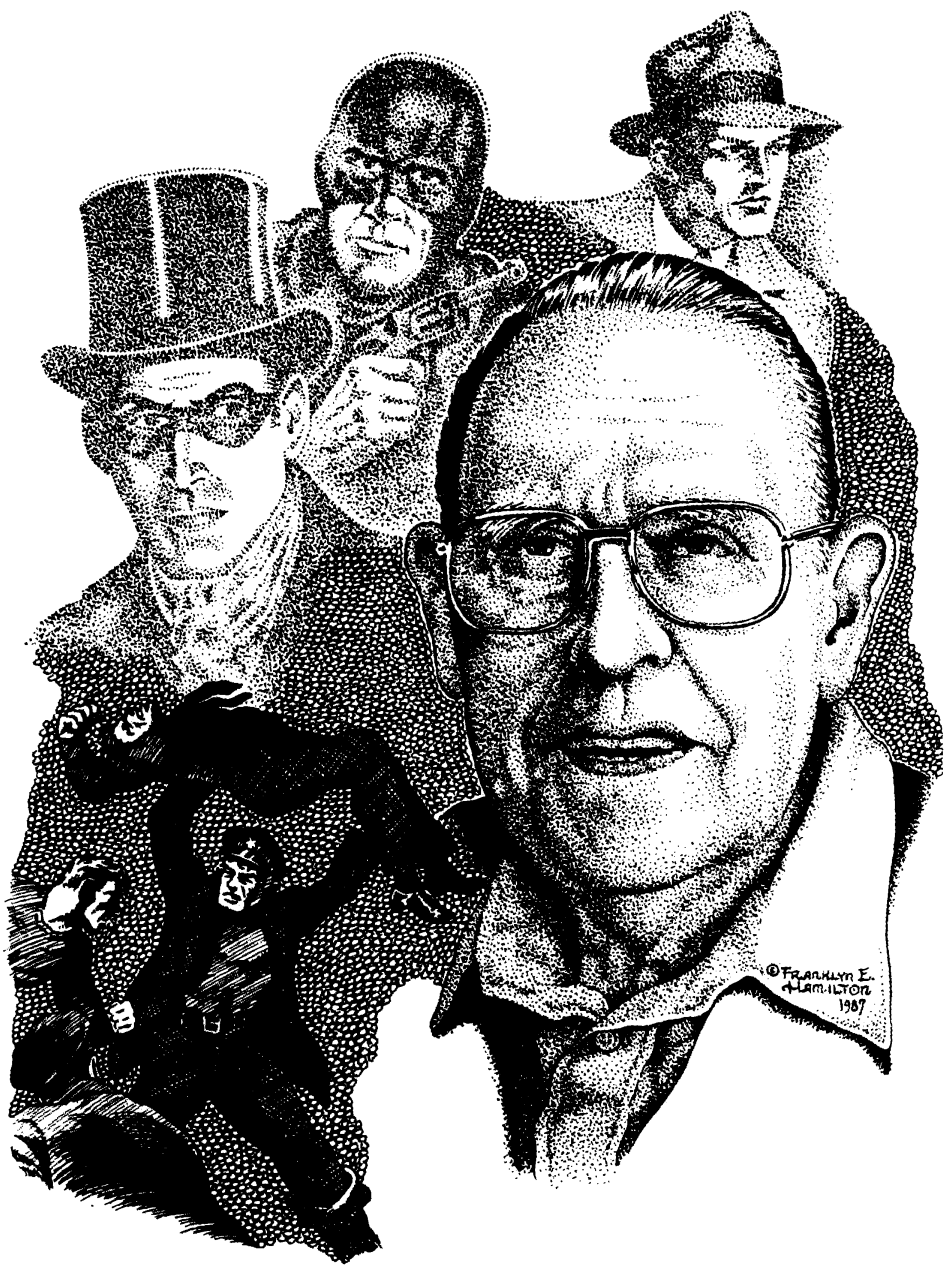
One of the most prolific writers for the hero pulps, Daniels pounded out dozens of *Phantom Detective* novels, 23 Jerry Wade stories and 15 Crimson Mask novelettes for *Detective Novels*, along with 23 Skipper shorts for *Doc Savage Magazine*.

From 1940-43, Daniels averaged a million words annually, an output only surpassed by Walter B. Gibson's prolific wordage for *The Shadow*. He was aided by his wife Dorothy, who regularly edited and retyped his manuscripts before launching her own writing career.

During 1940 alone, Norman Daniels wrote five Black Bat novels, eight Candid Camera Kid tales, four Masked Detective novels, four Crimson Mask novelettes, three Dan Fowler novels and single adventures of The Skipper and The Eagle, in addition to a variety of non-series stories.

Between 1949 and 1954, Daniels scripted 67 half-hour adventures for the *Nick Carter, Master Detective* radio series.

During the Golden Age of Television, Daniels wrote teleplays for a number of popular television series including *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Colt .45*, *Zane Grey Theater*, *The Chevron Hall of Stars*, *Sugarfoot*, *The Web*, *The Restless Gun* and *The Ford Television Theatre*. —Anthony Tollin •



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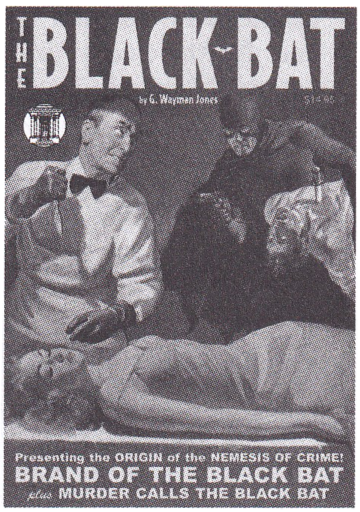

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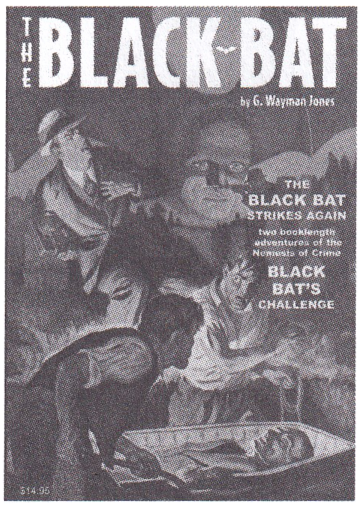

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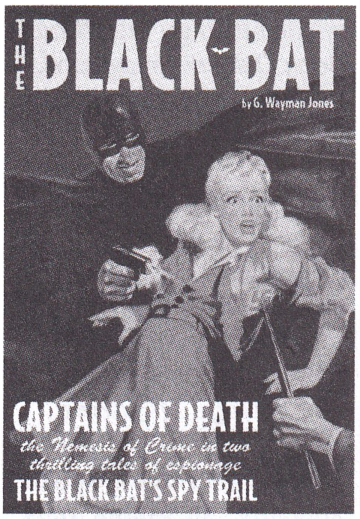

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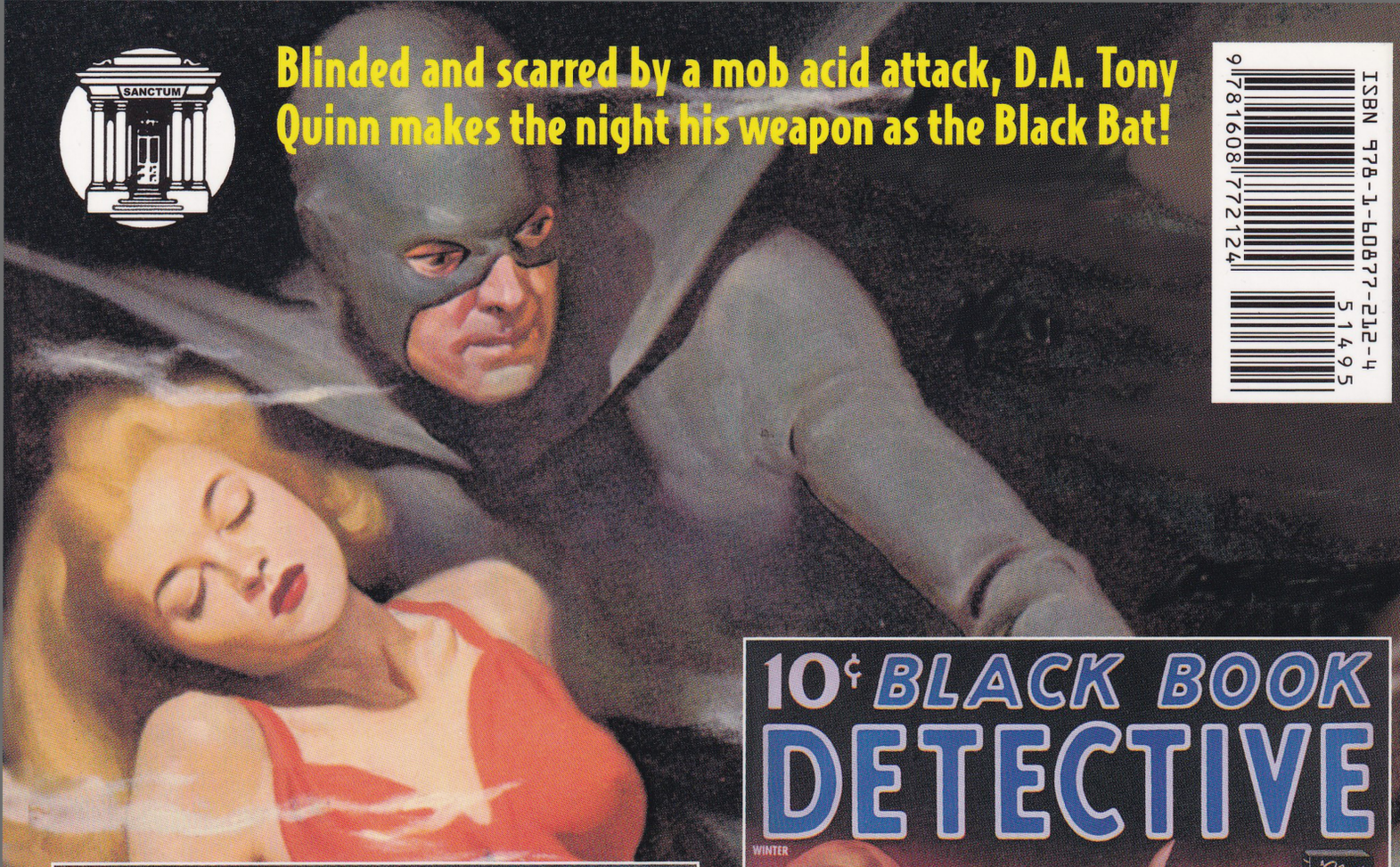

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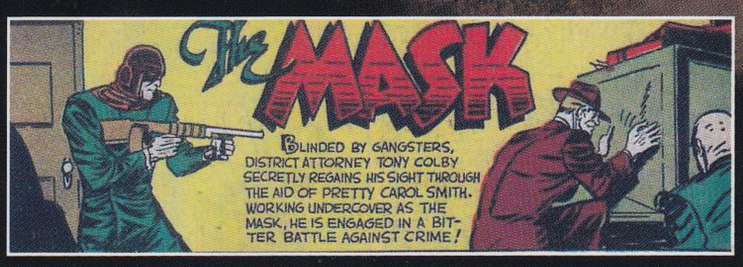
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